

DR. BHIMRAO AMBEDKAR

His Life and Work

M.L. SHAHARE



राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING

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Foreword

The life of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar is a saga of great struggle of a man who in spite of his being born in a family of "Untouchables", rose to great heights and occupied important positions entirely on account of his great merit and hard work. Dr. Ambedkar is one of those illustrious sons of our country, whose life and work has influenced and inspired both young and old generations before and after independence. His contribution in the making of the Constitution of India is phenomenal and similarly his contribution in other fields including education is something which ought to be made known to our young students. Dr. Ambedkar defiantly fought for the betterment of the oppressed classes. And in this struggle he showed rare crusading spirit, carving out in the process an important place for himself among the prominent architects of contemporary India.

NCERT has been bringing out large number of supplementary reading material for young students with a view to not only enrich their knowledge and understanding about great persons and important events of past and contemporary history, but also to introduce them to India's heritage. Therefore, it was in the fitness of things that NCERT brought out a book on Dr. Babasahib Ambedkar. This may be considered as NCERT's homage to the memory of one of the greatest sons of the country, whose life and work has inspired many people in general and the downtrodden in particular.

We are indeed grateful to Dr. M.L. Shahare, formerly Chairman, UPSC for agreeing to take up the work and prepare the present book. Special mention has to be made of Prof. K.D. Gangrade, Delhi School of Social Work, for reviewing the manuscript and contributing valuable suggestions for its improvement. We also record our appreciation of the work of Prof. D.S. Muley, DESSH, NCERT, who handled the whole project.

It is hoped that the book will prove to be interesting to our young students and generate in them further interest in the life and work of such great men that our country has produced in the past.

P.L. MALHOTRA

Director

New Delhi
August 1986

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PREFACE

This short biographical sketch of Dr. Babasahib Ambedkar is primarily meant to acquaint the youth of India with the life, thoughts and deeds of one of the most illustrious sons of our country; and also, in passing, give them an idea of the various forces which shaped his life. It is by no means to be taken as an authoritative or original biography of Dr. Ambedkar, for the simple reason that many others, possessing greater claim to scholarship and erudition, have already written a great deal about him. Perhaps the only reason which impelled me to attempt this biography of Dr. Babasahib Ambedkar is the fact that I have had the honour of knowing him personally in the formative years of my life and to have been deeply affected by his thoughts, ideas and ideals.

I owe a great deal of gratitude to several friends and well-wishers of mine who generously supplied me with a great deal of published and unpublished information on the life and times of Dr. Ambedkar. Particularly I am grateful to Dr. A.K. Sharma, an eminent scientist of I.A.R.I., New Delhi, Prof. K.D. Gangrade, Deptt. of Social Work, Delhi University and Principal D.N. Sandanshiv, Siddharth College of Law, Bombay who very kindly went through the manuscript and made very valuable suggestions. I am equally grateful to Prof. P.L. Malhotra, Director, NCERT and Prof. D.S. Muley, NCERT for inviting me to write this biography.

M.L. SHAHARE

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CHAPTER I

THE ROOTS

Dr. Ambedkar was born in a family of untouchables, originally hailing from Konkan, a part of the present State of Maharashtra. The term untouchable needs some elaboration. It is a well-known fact that the social organisation of the Hindu society has been based on the theory of *Chatur Varnya* and *Chatur Varnya* means the division of society into four classes or *Varnas*: the *Brahmins*, the *Kshatriyas*, the *Vaishyas* and the *Shudras*. Those belonging to the last named major *Varna* are popularly known as untouchables. Although scholars and historians differ as to the precise origin of this peculiar stratification of the Hindu society, it is generally agreed that in the early Aryan period, the caste system did not exist. It was only later when the system of division of labour came into being among the Aryans that the society was divided into four different castes. But it has to be emphasised that these castes were not based on the accident of birth but on the occupation in which a person was actually engaged. Thus, those who performed the religious ceremonies and mastered the Vedas came to be known as the Brahmins, those who took up arms to fight against their rival Aryan tribes or the original inhabitants of India popularly known as the Dravids came to be known as the Kshatriyas; those who engaged themselves in trade and commerce became the Vaishyas; and those who performed the inevitable menial tasks were known as the Shudras. Many scholars and historians endorse the view that this was purely a functional arrangement. Those who support this view quote instances from Hindu mythology which relates the cases of a Shudra or a Kshatriya attaining the status of a Brahmin by virtue of acquiring knowledge or performing saintly acts. It is emphasised that later on, at some unknown point of history, this original stratification of the society assumed a rigid form in which birth became the sole criterion for

determining the caste of a person. For instance, even a person not possessing the barest knowledge of the scriptures continued to be considered a Brahmin, merely because he happened to have been born in a Brahmin family.

With the passage of time, this process of the stratification of the Hindu society got further intensified as each *Varna* got further subdivided into castes and sub-castes. This process also affected the Shudras, who were split up into hundreds of sub-castes with different names and settled in one part or the other of this vast country of ours. Dr. Ambedkar was born in one such caste of the Shudra community called the Mahars.

The Shudras, at the time of Dr. Ambedkar's birth were not only treated as untouchables, but also those who should not be heard or seen. The degradation and indignity heaped upon them by the so-called upper castes though differed from one part of the country to another were never absent. Even in those parts or pockets of the country where there was a certain degree of tolerance towards them, they were never accepted as a part of the society. Thus at least one out of every four Hindus remained for all practical purposes outside the pale of the Hindu society. It is one of the inexplicable paradoxes of the Hindu society that this state of affairs was sanctioned by a religion which preached the existence of God in all things; both animate and inanimate. Anyway, the study of this paradox should be left for others. The scope and purpose of this book is to throw light on the life and work of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

As stated earlier, Dr. Ambedkar was born in a Mahar family originally hailing from Konkan. His ancestral village, Ambavade, was situated in the Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra. The Mahars of Konkan were among the first of the untouchables to come into contact with the Europeans, as the Portuguese first landed in Konkan. His family enjoyed a certain degree of distinction and prominence, as it provided the bearers of the *Palki* or Palenquin of the village Goddess. Ambedkar's family followed the preachings of Kabir, the well-known social reformer and rebel of Varanasi. It seems that this background greatly influenced the philosophy and deeds of Dr. Ambedkar.

A brief description of the relevant social and economic scene of this period of the rural Maharashtra would not be out of place here. During the Maratha regime the village officers which included Patil, Kulkarni, Desai, Nhavi (Barber), Sutar (carpenter) etc., were assigned specific

duties for the performance of which they were given revenue free lands. With the advent of British the old system of payment through Watan lands was abolished and was substituted by paid officers who were given regular salaries. Only the Mahars were kept out of the new administrative system. One of its direct effect was that the ex-Patils, Kulkarnis etc., who had been relieved of their official duties, were allowed to retain their lands. They had to pay only a nominal revenue on their *Watan* lands. In addition to it, the government started paying lakhs of rupees to the descendants of these village officers, though they had no duties to discharge towards their village. That is how the upper caste Hindus were placed in an advantageous position.

On the other hand, the Mahar (untouchable) Watandars, and practically every Mahar was a Watandar, were adversely affected. The British did not abolish their hereditary responsibilities. The Mahars continued to discharge their duties as before, but the concessional land revenue of "Judi" as it was called, was not extended to them. Instead, their land revenue was increased. This matter was examined by the government in 1874, and an Act was passed which laid down that *Watan* lands could not be alienated nor could burden on them be increased unless it was in the interest of the Mahar Watandars themselves. However, the Mahar Watan system was a system of heartless exploitation.

Thousands of Mahars suffered even greater hardships. There were innumerable villages in the province where the Mahars settled on their outskirts had to do all the jobs assigned to them without the benefit of *Watan* land or any other sort of payment. In fact, it was nothing short of forced labour.

Nevertheless, the usefulness of this community was so obvious to the villagers that the Mahars also known as Veskars, meaning the watchmen, could not be completely ignored. Mahars performed a number of useful functions. Their daring, courage, determination, faithfulness, loyalty and honesty were the qualities which had always been held in high esteem by the village population. They were always consulted by the sarpanch to settle any dispute that arose in the village and formed a part of the local panchayats even though they were made to sit on the ground to denote their caste status.

The Martial Mahars

Mahars were also great fighters. The martial history of the Mahars dates back to ancient days when these robust and redoubtable men roamed around the jungles of Western India (now Maharashtra). That was how they developed the capacity to suffer all sorts of hardships and became good soldiers. Chhatrapati Shivaji, who perfected the system of guerrilla warfare and was the principal destroyer of the Mughal Empire, recognised the great fighting qualities of the Mahars and recruited them in his army. Shidnak, a Mahar Sardar in Swai Madhav Rao's army, earned a great name as an audacious and daring warrior. Later on, the East India Company which successfully fought against the army of the Peshwa, also recruited soldiers from amongst the Mahars. The last battle between the Peshwa and the British was fought at Koregaon in the Pune district. A column at Koregaon raised by the British to commemorate the Battle of Koregaon, the last battle fought between the Peshwa and the British, bears the names of the soldiers who fell in that battle. Nine out of ten names are those of Mahars.

After Independence, the Mahar Regiment acquired the unique distinction of being in the fore-front in every battle. In every single battle, the Mahars gave abundant proof of their valour, tenacity and patriotism. General K.V. Krishna Rao, Colonel of the Mahar Regiment (retired), writes in his book the "History of the Mahar Regiment" (1981): "I have had the good fortune of personally commanding the Mahars in war.... and in counter-insurgency operations. The lasting impression that has been left on me is that a Mahar soldier is indomitable in spirit. And the Mahar officers always proved to be worthy leaders of these excellent men".

The present author had the opportunity of meeting General K.V. Krishna Rao in his chamber in South Block, New Delhi. Throughout the meeting the General narrated many incidents of the bravery of Mahar Regiment in the battles. He also revealed that he met Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on a few occasions when he was of the rank of a Major. According to him, Dr. Ambedkar insisted that the Mahar Regiment should live up to its high reputation of gallantry, endurance, courage and daring. Dr. Ambedkar also told him that it was due to his concerted efforts that there was fresh recruitment of the Mahars in the fighting arms of the Indian armed forces and recounted their daring deeds and their long history of soldiery.

Rich martial background of Dr. Ambedkar's ancestors played an important role in the formation of his character. Both Dr. Ambedkar's grandfather and father were army men. His father, Ramji Sakpal served in the British Indian Army. Dr. Ambedkar was born on April 14, 1891 at Mhow Cantonment, near Indore in Central India (now in the State of Madhya Pradesh) where his father was posted at that time. There is an apocryphal story that a saintly relative of Ramji Sakpal who had renounced the world, predicted that the child to be born would leave a permanent mark on history. Dr. Ambedkar, the 14th child of Ramji Sakpal, was named Bhim, after the well-known brother of Pandavas. Interestingly, his mother's name was also Bheema Bai. She hailed from a comparatively well-to-do family of the village of Murhad in the Thane (then Thana) district of the then Bombay Presidency. Her family had also a tradition of military service. Thus both from the paternal and maternal sides, Bhim Rao Ambedkar inherited martial qualities.

CHAPTER II

EARLY LIFE

Bhim's father retired from the army at Mhow in 1893 and settled down at Dapoli in Konkan. Little Bhim was admitted into a school at Dapoli at the age of 5, along with his elder brother. As ex-subedar Ramji could not maintain his large family on his small pension, he took up a job at Satara. Not long after the family moved on to Satara where Bhim's mother passed away and the entire burden of bringing up of the family fell on the shoulders of ex-subedar Ramji. This tragedy occurred when Bhim was hardly six years old. Out of 14 children born of Ramji and Bheemabai only three of his brothers and two of his sisters survived.

Ramji was not only a very pious person but also a strict disciplinarian. He spared no pains to impart his children the three Rs. Besides, he made it a practice to recite parts of the great epics, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* as well as the devotional songs of Kabir and the great saints of Maharashtra to his children everyday.

Soon, Bhim completed his primary education and entered high school along with his elder brother, Anand. During this period, Bhim witnessed several incidents which conveyed to him the cruelty of the caste system in our country and left an indelible mark on his



Late Shri Ramji Maloji Ambedkar—Dr Ambedkar's father

impressionable and sensitive mind. To quote only one such incident: on a hot summer day, Bhim and his elder brother Anand left Satata to meet their father Ramji who was then working as a cashier at Goregaon. They travelled by train upto Masur station where they were supposed to be received by their father. They waited for him for many hours but he didn't come. The fact was that he had not received their letter intimating him about their arrival. So, they hired a bullockcart for completing their onward journey to Goregaon. Soon the bullockcart driver who was an upper caste Hindu came to know that his passengers were untouchables. He made them get down there and then. It was only after they promised to pay him double the amount of the agreed fare that Bhim and his brother were allowed to proceed; and that too on the condition that Anand drove the cart and the cartman followed on foot. However, the boys had to travel from evening till night, without a sip of water, because everybody on the road having come to know that they were untouchables, refused even to quench their thirst!

Although Bhim experienced humiliating treatment meted out to him because of his accident of birth in an untouchable's family, he had also the good fortune to receive completely unexpected kindness from certain enlightened persons of the so-called upper castes. For example having made a bet with a schoolmate of his, he walked several miles to the school in a heavy downpour. His teacher, a Brahmin surnamed Pendse, who saw him in this condition was touched at the sight of the scantily clad Bhim shivering after his long and arduous journey, and asked his son to take Bhim to his house, give him dry clothes and warm food to eat. There was another Brahmin teacher in the school with the surname Ambedkar, who somehow had a soft corner for Bhim and treated him like his own child. He shared a part of his own lunch with him everyday. Bhim's original family surname was Sakpal. It was the kindness of this teacher which made Bhim ultimately adopt Ambedkar as his surname. In fact, it was this teacher, Ambedkar, who himself changed Bhim's surname from Sakpal to Ambedkar in the school records. This is the surname by which Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was to go down in history.

When Bhim was about ten years old, his father decided to marry again. Bhim naturally did not like the idea of having a step-mother and took the decision to be independent of his father for his daily needs. To achieve this, he even thought taking up a petty job in one of the cotton mills in Bombay. He even considered stealing some money from his

aunt (his father's sister) to enable him to reach Bombay. However, his good sense made him realise that he must somehow pursue his studies and make his mark in the world. From that day onwards, he became a diligent student and came to be loved even more by his teachers.

Soon after, the family moved over to Bombay where it started living in a *chawl* (or a single room tenement). A large number of families were huddled together in these *chawls* and lived there under almost sub-human conditions. After moving to Bombay, Bhim and his brothers were admitted to the Maratha High School. Bhim's desire to concentrate on his studies became more intense after his family shifted to Bombay. This desire was generously supported by Ramji, who even went to the extent of borrowing money from his two married daughters for purchasing books for Bhim.

After some time, Bhim's father admitted him to the Elphinston High School which was at that time one of the best schools of Bombay. He now pursued his studies with single-minded determination, although he had to live in the single room apartment occupied by his entire family.

Even the Elphinston High School was not free from the ever-present shadow of untouchability. Although Bhim was deeply interested in learning Sanskrit, he was not allowed to do so as he was an untouchable. It was because of this reason that he was forced, much against his will, to choose Persian. But later, Bhim's unconquerable will enabled him to become a scholar of high calibre in Sanskrit, the very language, he was forbidden to learn in his school days.

Bhim, despite all the hardships imposed upon him for being an untouchable, passed the matriculation examination in 1907 from the Elphinston High School. He scored the highest marks in Persian.

During this period, there were no hostels for the poor, needy and deserving students at the school and college level. Apart from that there was none to guide and direct these first generation of students. There were a few schools in any district and a few colleges and institutions that existed were located in big cities like Pune and Bombay. Even the children from well-to-do high-caste families were unable to pursue their studies. One can very well imagine the conditions of the students belonging to the suppressed, oppressed and depressed community who had no tradition whatsoever of learning and education, because the *Shastras* did not allow them to do so. An untouchable from a village and coming to the district headquarters or a

capital city of the province for school education was something which could not even be dreamt of in those days.

Therefore, Bhim's completion of his school education was indeed a milestone in the history of the untouchables of India. The event was befittingly celebrated by his community. A special meeting was called under the presidentship of S.K. Bole, a well known Maharashtrian social reformer, and was attended by another social reformer and Marathi scholar, the late Shri K.A. Keluskar, an assistant teacher at the Wilson High School, Bombay. Keluskar had often met Bhim in a garden where both of them spent long hours in studying. The latter became so fond of Bhim that he not only permitted him to borrow extensively from his wide collection of books, but also presented him a copy of his own book entitled *Life of Gautama Buddha*. It would be accurate to say that this book had a great impact on the mind of Bhim, and prepared him for his ultimate conversion to Buddhism.

In keeping with the customs of those days, Bhim was compelled to marry soon after passing his High School examination. The marriage took place at night in an open shed of the Byculla market of Bombay. Bhim, at that time, was only a little over 16 years and his bride, Rami, was hardly nine. After the marriage, she was given a new name, Ramabai.

Bhim's marriage at such an early age could not extinguish Bhim's desire for knowledge, which was encouraged by his ageing father. After his matriculation, he joined the Elphinston College, Bombay. Misfortune, however, continued to dog his footsteps. After he had passed his intermediate examination, he was in no position to continue his education as the family had no money. However, luck was in his favour. His old well-wisher K.A. Keluskar, having come to know of Bhim's difficulties, personally approached the then Maharaja of Baroda His Highness, Sir Sayajirao Gaekwad, a noble-hearted and a broad-minded ruler. The Maharaja of Baroda had made an announcement some time earlier, at a meeting in Bombay offering his help to any worthy untouchable who wanted to pursue higher studies. At the request of Keluskar, the Maharaja of Baroda called Bhim, asked him some searching questions and having been completely satisfied with his replies, assured him of financial help for pursuing higher studies. Bhim was granted a scholarship of Rs. 25 per month, which was quite a big amount of money in those days.

After that, Bhim was able to pursue his studies without any

distraction. Also, this financial assistance enabled the family to move into a two-room apartment in Parel, Bombay. Bhim was given a room of his own where he could study in peace while the other room was occupied by the other members of the family. He passed his B.A. examination in 1913.

After having passed his B.A. examination, Bhim was selected for the post of a Lieutenant in the Baroda State's Army. However, fate again intervened. He received a telegram in January 1913 hardly a fortnight after joining the service, that his father was critically ill in Bombay. His love for his father gained the upper hand over his own worldly interests and he immediately left for Bombay. On reaching Bombay the next day, he found that his father was dying. On that fateful day, February 2, 1913, Bhim was practically inconsolable. He had seen his brave father wage a struggle to survive in a hostile world. However, it seems that Ex-Subedar Ramji must have passed on to his favourite son, Bhim his own indomitable will to conquer adversities, when he put his hand on his son's back before passing away from this world.

CHAPTER III

SOJOURN IN THE WEST—AN ACADEMIC ACCOMPLISHMENT

Circumstances play an important role in the lives of human beings. Had Bhim's father not been taken critically ill, Bhim would not have left the employment of the Baroda State. What would have been the ultimate destiny of Bhim Rao Ambedkar, if this had not happened is a matter of speculation. In all probability, he would have continued to serve the State of Baroda and might have slowly arisen to occupy perhaps the highest possible office viz. the prime ministership of the State. However, those were the days when even this attainment was beyond the wildest dreams of an untouchable. But Bhim was destined to play a much more important role in the history of his country and leave an indelible mark on the memory of its people.

In June 1913, the Maharaja of Baroda announced that he would send some deserving students to the United States of America for higher studies at the Columbia University at the State's expenses. On hearing this, Bhim took the earliest opportunity of meeting the Maharaja at his next visit to Bombay and expressed his earnest desire to be given a chance to avail of this opportunity. The Maharaja who was already convinced of Bhim's intrinsic worth, advised him to apply for one of the scholarships offered by his State. Bhim Rao complied with the wishes of this noble-hearted Prince and on June 4, 1913, he along with three other applicants signed an agreement in the presence of the deputy minister for education of the Baroda State, conveying his willingness to devote his entire period of stay in the United States of America for studying the prescribed subjects and then serve the State for a period of ten years after the completion of his studies at the Columbia University.

This was, indeed, a turning point in Bhim Rao's life and opened undreamt of vistas of opportunity and experience in a country which upheld the basic principles of equal opportunity for everybody. It is a

common knowledge that North America which was a colony of the British in the late eighteenth century waged a historic struggle for independence under the leadership of great men like George Washington. The subsequent battle for abolition of slavery of the American Negroes in which men of vision like Abraham Lincoln was a great event in world history. The United States of America emerged into a powerful, united and truly liberal and democratic State out of these turmoils and the Statue of Liberty on the New York Harbour today came to symbolise the principles of "Freedom, Equality and Fraternity" for which this new nation stood for. The world had not come out of the spell cast by people like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and the great Negro leader Booker T. Washington. America was in those days truly a land of dreams. Bhim Rao arrived in New York in the third week of July 1913 with tremendous hope and fervour in his heart. After moving from one lodging to another in the initial period, he finally settled down at the Livingstone Hall dormitory with Naval Bhathena, a Parsi student from Bombay. It was here that Bhim and Naval struck a life-long friendship.

For the first time, Bhim Rao had the opportunity to move, think and act freely without the stigma of untouchability haunting him for ever. His inborn intelligence and deep insight at last found the proper atmosphere for growth and development. The letters written by him to friends and relations from Columbia University during this period were an ample testimony of this. For example, in one of his letters written to a friend of his father, he advocated the cause of women's education. He emphasised that the education of young women was as important as that of young men, if the goal of social progress was to be achieved.

Determined to make the best possible use of the unique opportunity which circumstances had thrown in his way, Bhim Rao applied himself with a single-minded devotion to his studies. He did not waste his time in indulging in recreational activities which were normal for the other students of his age. Moreover, he had the responsibility to send a part of his stipend to maintain his family. To do this, he cut down even on his food. For his M.A. course, Bhim Rao took up such difficult and diverse subjects as political science, moral philosophy, anthropology, sociology and economics and studied for as many as 18 hours a day. In 1915, Ambedkar was awarded his M.A. degree for his thesis entitled "Ancient Indian Commerce". Apart from this, he presented a paper

entitled "Castes in India, their Mechanism, Genesis and Development", in a seminar on anthropology in May 1916 in which he not only traced the origin of the caste system in India brilliantly but also pointed out its evil consequences. In June 1916, he submitted his thesis for the Ph. D. degree to the Columbia University which was entitled "The National Dividend of India, a Historic and Analytical Study". Later on, this thesis was enlarged and published as "The Evolution of Imperial Provincial Finance in India". The entire book was highly critical of the British bureaucracy and of the British imperial system and brought out forcefully Ambedkar's love and concern for his country.

After the successful completion of his studies at the Columbia University, Ambedkar left New York in 1916 for London and entered in October 1916 the Gray's Inn for doing his Bar-at-Law, and also simultaneously enrolled himself in the famous London School of Economics. His stay in London was, once again, made possible by the benevolence of the Maharaja of Baroda, who gave him the permission to continue his studies in England on State scholarship. However, the Dewan of Baroda took a different stand and Ambedkar was asked to come back. Before leaving England with a heavy heart, he obtained special permission from the London University through the kind recommendation of his professor, Dr. Edwin Cannon, to resume his studies in London within a period not exceeding four years from October 1917. He booked his luggage on a steamer which consisted mostly of books. Unfortunately this steamer was torpedoed by a German submarine on the way, but luckily, the ship in which Ambedkar was travelling reached Bombay safely. This was the period of the World War I.

Ambedkar reached Bombay on August 21, 1917. That was the time when India was in turmoil. Lord Montague, the Secretary of State for India had come to India to assess the political situation. He stayed in India throughout the months of November and December 1917. Carefully studying the situation, Ambedkar did not consider it proper to express his opinion on the political and social turmoil then raging in India, as he was under bond to serve the State of Baroda for ten years. So he reached Baroda in September, 1917. The Maharaja wanted to appoint him as the Finance Minister after giving him a chance to gain some experience in the field of administration. To begin with, he was appointed the Military Secretary to the Maharaja. Even though he

attained this high position, the stigma of untouchability did not stop pursuing him. Even the peons considered it below their dignity to give him a glass of water. No hotel was prepared to put him up. In desperation, he sent a note to the Maharaja, who referred the matter to the Dewan but there was nobody who could do anything about it. Deeply disappointed, Ambedkar bid good bye to Baroda in November, 1917 and came back to Bombay. Soon after his step-mother passed away.

In Bombay, Ambedkar came in touch with another enlightened Prince, the Maharaja of Kolhapur, Shahu Maharaj, who had been trying to do his best to break down the barriers of the caste system and help the untouchables in every possible way. This turned out to be yet another turning point in his life. The Maharaja not only appointed the untouchables to posts in his personal staff, provided the untouchable students with free education, board and lodging but even went to the extent of taking meals with them in public. It can truly be said that Shahu Maharaj was one of the few persons whose heart revolted against the tyranny of our caste system and whose sympathies were genuinely with the unfortunate downtrodden castes. In 1919, the Maharaja helped Ambedkar to start a fortnightly paper. The paper first came out on January 31, 1920 under the name of *Mook Nayak*. Although Ambedkar was not its editor officially, this paper became his mouth-piece. He made full use of it to expose, with his brilliant logic, the irrationality and the basic injustice inherent in the caste system. The reason why Dr. Ambedkar did not become the official editor of the paper was the fact that in November, 1918 he was appointed, on a temporary basis, the Professor of Economics in the Government Sydenham College of Commerce and Economics in Bombay. His sole aim in accepting the post was to save sufficient money to go back to England and complete his unfinished studies at the London School of Economics. With this in mind, Ambedkar continued to live a very simple life in those very two rooms in the Improvement Trust *chawl* in Parel which his family had been occupying since his father's days. He gave a fixed amount of his salary every month to his wife, Ramabai. Finally, by July 1920, Ambedkar had saved sufficient money and also got some financial help from the Maharaja of Kolhapur besides a loan of Rs. 5,000 from his old friend, Naval Bhathena. This enabled him to leave for London in July 1920. He pursued his studies in economics at the London School of Economics and was called to bar

simultaneously. In addition, he spent long hours at the famous London Museum Library. Life in London was harsh. Ambedkar stayed as a paying guest in a boarding house owned by a stern lady. The breakfast and the dinner were hardly sufficient to keep body and soul together. Yet so intense was Ambedkar's craving for knowledge that he managed to live even on whatever little food he got in the boarding house. He was too poor to eat outside. From time to time his old friend, Bhathena helped him financially. His total monthly expenses did not exceed eight pounds. He walked long distances because he could not afford to pay for train fare or hire other modes of conveyance.

Ambedkar's painstaking research work in London resulted in completing his thesis entitled "Provincial Decentralization of Imperial Finance in British India" for which he was awarded the degree of Master of Science in June 1921. In October next year, he completed another thesis entitled "The Problem of the Rupee" for the University of London. However, working hard on these two thesis hardly left for him any spare time to pursue his studies for the degree of Barrister-at-Law; and he was not able to appear for the examination. Before that, he had made a trip to the famous University of Bonn, Germany (now the capital of the Federal Republic of Germany) for taking up higher



Dr Ambedkar after completing bar-at-law

studies in that august institution. During this preliminary visit to Bonn from April to early May 1922, he had arranged his admission to the university and came back to London in May 1922. Soon after submitting his thesis on *The Problem of the Rupee* to the University of London in 1922, he proceeded to Bonn. However, fate again stood in his way. His thesis raised a furore in the academic world of the University of London, because of his frank and forthright criticism of the British fiscal system in India. Even a socialist professor like Harold Laski was convinced, like many other dons of the University of London, that Ambedkar was an Indian revolutionary. He was, therefore, called back to London in March 1923 by Professor Edwin Cannon, who asked him to re-write his thesis. However, Ambedkar could not simply afford to stay on in London for this purpose since his finances had almost completely exhausted. His family in India too, was in extreme financial difficulties. He was, therefore, compelled to return to Bombay with a heavy heart in April 1923 and re-wrote his thesis, as advised by Professor Edwin Cannon, and sent it to him, without changing any of the conclusions drawn by him from his studies. This time the University of London accepted the thesis and awarded him the degree of Doctor of Science. A modified version of his controversial thesis was published by M/s. King and Son, London, a famous publishing house of London of those days, in December 1923. Bhim Rao Ambedkar dedicated the publication to the memory of his father and mother, to whom he owed so much. Bhim Rao also was honest enough to acknowledge to his intimate friends that although Professor Cannon had asked him to re-write his thesis, he had the magnanimity of not compelling him (Bhim Rao) to change any of his conclusions, controversial though they were. Instead, Prof. Cannon had the magnanimity to pay a handsome compliment to Bhim Rao by acknowledging the "stimulating freshness in his views and reasons". The reasons for the furore caused by Bhim Rao's thesis were simple: in it he had explained in clear terms the manner in which the relationship of the Indian rupee to the British pound was artificially manipulated by our former imperialist rulers, causing a crushing financial burden on the Indian economy.

Bhim Rao had by now acquired qualifications which very few of his contemporaries had, though the hardships he had to undergo for accomplishing were indeed enormous. Judged by any standard, he proved himself to be a person of an extraordinary intellect. He never

flinched from telling the truth. Despite western education and its influence, he had deep roots in the Indian soil and spent the rest of his life in identifying the problems of his motherland and in finding out ways to solve them

CHAPTER IV

HOMECOMING

Dr. Ambedkar came back to India in April 1923. Although he had by that time acquired the highest possible academic qualifications from the foremost centres of learning in England, America and Germany, he was in extreme financial difficulties. He, therefore, decided that in order to maintain himself and his family the best course for him would be to practise as a barrister so that he could devote his spare time to the cause of the upliftment of the untouchables and also meet his worldly needs. However, his financial condition at the time was such that he did not even have the money for obtaining the licence or *sanad* for practising as a lawyer. At this juncture his old friend, Mr. Naval Bhathena, once again came to his help and gave him the required amount of money. That was how Dr. Ambedkar was at last able to start his practice as a barrister in June 1923.

Facing an Ugly Reality

Dr. Ambedkar's caste again stood in his way. The litigants belonging to the upper castes were not willing to hire even such a highly qualified barrister and those who did were mostly from the poorer sections who could pay either very little or no money at all for his services. Bhim Rao was naturally depressed by these conditions but his spirit was as usual undaunted and his determination and enthusiasm unabated.

But this was not all. Dr. Ambedkar faced another problem. In those days, when our country was ruled by the British, there was a widespread belief that hiring the services of European barristers was the key to winning a case. Most of the judges were European. Yet another difficulty faced by Dr. Ambedkar was the fact that the solicitors, who were mostly upper caste Hindus, did not wish to have any business

dealings with an untouchable. Bhim Rao, therefore, had to face a difficult situation even in a profession for which he was so eminently qualified. In the beginning, he had to be content with small cases in the subordinate courts, and wait patiently for the day when he would be able to appear with full dignity in the High Court. Under this difficult and trying situation, Dr. Ambedkar did not lose courage. He was extremely confident that some day he would definitely succeed and make a mark in his chosen profession. He was not a person to be cowed down by such adverse circumstances.

During the early 1920s, when Dr. Ambedkar started his practice, several forces and factors were inevitably moulding the destiny of the country. Among them was high growth of indigenous textile mills in and around Bombay, the gathering momentum of the freedom struggle launched by Mahatma Gandhi, a gradual but definite awakening among the untouchables in the country, world-wide upsurge of democracy after World War I and the establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic after the overthrow of the despotic rule of the Czar in Russia.

The resolution passed by the Bombay Legislative Council on August 4, 1923, which was moved by the late Shri S.K. Bole was another major event of this period. "The Council recommends that the untouchable classes be allowed to use all public places including wells and *dharamshalas* which were built and maintained out of public funds or administered by the government bodies or created by statutes as well as public schools, courts, offices and dispensaries". To implement this Act, the Government of Bombay Presidency issued a directive to the heads of departments under it on September 11 1923 asking them to give effect to the resolution of the Legislative Council in so far as it relates to public places and institutions belonging to and maintained by the Government and request the District Collectors to advise the local public bodies under their jurisdiction to consider the desirability of accepting the recommendation of the Council in so far as it relates to them. A similar directive was also issued to the Chairman of the Bombay Improvement Trust and the Municipal Commissioner of the Bombay City for giving effect to the Council's resolution in regard to the public places under their control.

Two significant events occurred in the following year. Veer Savarkar was released after 12 years of imprisonment in Andamans and interned in Ratnagiri on January 6, 1924. Mahatma Gandhi was released on

February 11, 1924, on grounds of ill-health from the Yeravada jail after undergoing two years' imprisonment. Both Veer Savarkar and Mahatma Gandhi had taken up the cause of the social upliftment of the untouchables and the consolidation or unification of the Hindu society, though their programmes and styles of functioning were different from each other. Savarkar started his work in April 1924 by establishing an organisation known as *Hindu Sanghatan* whose main aim was the upliftment of the depressed classes. Gandhiji also began a forceful movement for eradication of untouchability. At the same time, Dr. Ambedkar launched his movement for the upliftment of the untouchables. He convened a meeting on March 9, 1924 at Damodar Hall, Bombay, to discuss the need of establishing a central organisation for removing the innumerable handicaps from which the untouchables suffered and for placing their grievances before the Government. Following this meeting, a society named *Bahishkrt Hitakarini Sabha* was formed to promote the interests of the untouchables, but its activities were confined to the Presidency of Bombay and its head office was located at Damodar Hall, Bombay.

The principal aims of the *Sabha* were: to promote the spread of education amongst the untouchables; to promote the spread of culture amongst the untouchables by opening libraries, study circles etc.; to improve the economic status of the untouchables by starting industrial and agricultural schools; and to bring the grievances of the depressed classes to the attention of the Government. The president of the Sabha was the late Sir C.H. Seetalved, an upper caste Gujarati Hindu and a brilliant lawyer of his days. Its vice-presidents included such eminent persons as M. Nissim, Justice of Peace; Shri Rustomji-Jinwala, an eminent Parsi solicitor; late Shri G.K. Nariman; late Dr. R.P. Paranjape, the famous mathematician; late Dr. V.P. Chavan and late Shri B.G. Kher who in 1939 became the first premier of the then Bombay Presidency. Dr. Ambedkar was the chairman of the managing committee. The composition of the committee reflected the broad and secular outlook of Dr. Ambedkar. He had a firm belief that untouchability should be the concern not only of the untouchables alone but of all the sections of the Indian society. There was a subtle distinction between the approach adopted by Dr. Ambedkar towards the eradication of untouchability and that adopted by the several other organisations which were also working in their own way for the same cause. Dr. Ambedkar was of the firm conviction that a distinction

existed between social reform confined only to the reform of the Hindu family, and social reform aimed at a complete reorganisation and reconstruction of the entire Hindu society. This was an important distinction between the movement launched by Dr. Ambedkar and the organisations like the Social Conference founded by Justice Ranade whose goals were confined to only such marginal and outward reforms like widow-remarriage etc. and its activities were essentially confined only to the upper castes. The same was the case with other organisations like the *Prarthana Samaj* and the *Brahmo Samaj*. While it would be entirely wrong to deny Gandhiji's sincerity in the cause of upliftment of the untouchables, as it was evident from his deeds as well as writings in the famous paper started by him called *Harijan*, it would be equally untruthful to say that Gandhiji's approach was one mainly of treating the symptom rather than the disease. In making this statement, no disrespect is meant for the Father of the Nation. Gandhiji was a genuine seeker of truth. But no human being, however, great could be expected to be perfect in every respect.

Dr. Ambedkar was firmly convinced, being possessed of a highly rational mind, that untouchability could be removed only by bringing about a complete reform in the structure of the entire Hindu society and not merely by showing gestures like taking food with the untouchables, shaking hands with them or treating them with kindness or courtesy. He firmly believed that a complete reconstruction of the Hindu society, including the abolition of the caste system by an Act of free India's legislature; the abolition of the system of priesthood, which was confined only to the Brahmins, and the standardization of the scriptures, rituals and religious practices for the entire Hindu society could remove the stigma of untouchability effectively and permanently.

Thus while Babasahib as well as Mahatma Gandhi had the same goal of the ultimate removal of untouchability, their individual approach to achieve the goal was radically different. Not to acknowledge this fact would be an affront to the memory of these two truly great sons of our country. Yet we have to be quite clear in our minds that both Bapu and Bhim were equally sincere to their common cause even though they tried to achieve it in different ways.

CHAPTER V

LAUNCHING THE STRUGGLE FOR RIGHTS

Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha

The *Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha* launched a purposeful programme in keeping with its aims and objects in order to arouse the untouchables and make them conscious of their rights. The *Sabha* arranged for hostel accommodation at Sholapur for high school students who belonged to the families of untouchables in January 1925. All the expenses of the boarders of the hostel for clothes, stationery and food were met by the *Sabha*. The Sholapur Municipality came to the help of the *Sabha* and sanctioned a grant of Rs. 40 for the maintenance of the hostel. The *Sabha* also started an institution of the depressed classes with the aim of inculcating in them a desire to acquire knowledge and also a desire for social service. A reading room and a hockey club were started in Bombay with the purpose of providing healthier forms of recreation for untouchable youths.

The establishment of the *Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha* was in fact the outward expression of Dr. Ambedkar's ideas regarding the ways and means to remove untouchability. The *Sabha* also provided a good forum for Dr. Ambedkar to actively pursue the programme leading to the realization of the goals of the *Sabha*, and also to work actively and openly for the upliftment of the untouchables. He moved from village to village and town to town to bring about an awakening among the untouchables and to make them assert their rights. He attended and guided the first Provincial Depressed Classes Conference held at Nipani in the Bombay Presidency in 1925 and also presided over the first conference of untouchables held at Malwan in the same year. After the conference, he visited some places in Goa for the same purpose before returning to Bombay.

By the time, Dr. Ambedkar's scholarly achievements came to be noticed. A statement that he had submitted to the Royal Commission on Indian Currency and Finance was taken note of by the latter. In this report, he had cogently argued that the Gold Exchange Standard was detrimental to the financial interests of India because it did not have the in-built stability of the gold standard as was the case with Britain. Consequently, the Royal Commission called Dr. Ambedkar on December 15, 1925 and interviewed him on the subject.

Awakening of the Untouchables

A *satyagraha* was launched at Vaikam in the Travancore State by the late E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker, a non-Brahmin leader who later founded the *Dravida Kazhagam* Party, for asserting the rights of the untouchables to use a road which had been closed to them, although it was a public and not a private road. The subsequent orders by the Ruler of the Travancore State allowing the untouchables to use the road, was an important event of 1925. The event had a great impact on untouchables in the rest of the country deeply. Another sensational event which took place in the then Madras State in March, 1926 was the entry of an untouchable named Murgesan into a Hindu temple. His arrest and prosecution on the charge of defiling a Hindu place of worship, also shook the untouchables of the country. It was worth mentioning that the late Shri C. Rajgopalachari, who later became the first Governor-General of independent India, happened to be present in the court when Murgesan's trial was going on. Though he was not handling the case himself, he with the permission of the British Judge, cross-examined the Public Prosecutor and completely demolished his case. Murgesan was acquitted of the charges and his freedom restored.

At the same time, Dr. Ambedkar was slowly but surely making his mark as a lawyer. In 1926, some Brahmins of Pune had filed a suit against three non-Brahmin leaders, charging them with defaming the Brahmin community because they had published a pamphlet saying that the Brahmins had ruined India. The prosecution was led by late L.B. Bhopatkar, an eminent lawyer of Pune and the defence by Dr. Ambedkar. In his arguments Dr. Ambedkar ably and eloquently defended his clients and won the case. This was a major event in the life of Dr. Ambedkar, since it not only brought about a great awakening among the untouchables but also established his reputation as a lawyer beyond any doubt.

Although the resolution moved by late Shri S.K. Bole was passed by the Bombay Legislative Council which asked the local boards, municipalities and the Bombay Corporation to allow the untouchables the free use of all public places like wells, tanks, schools, hospitals and *dharamshalas*, it remained more or less on paper. That was why Shri Bole was compelled to move another resolution in the Bombay Legislative Council on August 5, 1926. He recommended that the Government of Bombay Presidency may not give any grant to those municipalities and local boards which failed to give effect to the earlier resolution passed by the council three years ago.

Although Dr. Ambedkar was a fairly well known lawyer and a social worker by now, he kept on living in the same Bombay Improvement Trust tenement which had meagre basic amenities like lavatories, bathrooms and water taps. His office was situated in a building in the neighbourhood, owned by the Social Service League, Bombay. At this time, the post of the principal of Sydenham College, Bombay, fell vacant. There was perhaps nobody else in the Bombay Presidency who was better qualified to hold this post than Dr. Ambedkar. He had already worked as Professor of Economics at the same college earlier for a short time. An enlightened person like Dr. R.P. Patanjape, who was then the Member for Education, Bombay Presidency, was unable to get Dr. Ambedkar appointed as principal of the Sydenham College, in spite of Shri Keluskar personally meeting him and pleading Dr. Ambedkar's case. Dr. Patanjape did offer a professorship in the Elphinstone College to Dr. Ambedkar but he refused it. However, since June 1925, he had already accepted the part time post of a lecturer in the Batliboi's Accountancy Training Institute to teach Mercantile law. He carried on with that part time job till the end of March 1928. During the same period, Dr. Ambedkar's wife gave birth to his second son, who was named Rajratna, and also a daughter, Indu who, however, died in her infancy. Ramabai's health had begun to deteriorate and Dr. Ambedkar thought it best to send her along with his two sons to her native place for a change. Unfortunately, Rajratna passed away in July 1926 and Dr. Ambedkar was deeply touched by his death.

Dr. Ambedkar did not remain preoccupied with his private sorrows and griefs for long. He had by now become famous among the depressed classes whose members came to him from far away places in the Bombay Presidency, with their tales of sorrow and distress, asking

him to take up their cases in the courts of law. He gave them free legal advice and fought their cases with vigour, charging them very little or nothing at all. Not only this, he even provided free boarding and lodging to many who had no place to stay in Bombay.

In January 1927, a meeting was held at Koregaon War Memorial near Pune by the depressed classes which was attended by many prominent leaders of the untouchables. Dr. Ambedkar addressing the meeting said that hundreds of persons from their community had fought in the British Army in the World War I but the British Government had later on declared the untouchables unfit for military service. He exhorted the untouchables to agitate against this patently discriminatory policy in order to compel the Government to remove the ban on the untouchables entering the armed forces. In the same month i.e. January 1927, the Governor of Bombay nominated Dr. Ambedkar to the Bombay Legislative Council as a member. A meeting was held on April 19, 1927 in the Damodar Hall, Bombay at which a purse was presented to him. Dr. Ambedkar expressing his gratitude to the people for this gesture, donated the entire amount to the *Bahishkerit Hitkarini Sabha*.

Satyagraha at Mahad

After becoming a Member of the Bombay Legislative Council Dr. Ambedkar had much greater opportunity to put legitimate grievances of the depressed classes before the Government. He was now determined to see that the Bole Resolution first passed by the Bombay legislative Council in 1923 and reaffirmed in 1926 did not remain a mere scrap of paper. For instance, although the Mahad Municipality had thrown open the Chawdar Tank to the untouchables on paper, they could not use the tank because of the strong opposition of the high caste Hindus. Those concerned decided to hold a conference at Mahad in the Kolaba District on March 19-20, 1927 to which the organisers invited Dr. Ambedkar. The arrangements for holding the conference had been made by a team of dedicated persons which included some members of the upper castes. The conference was attended by about 5000 delegates, workers and leaders of the depressed classes representing practically every district of Maharashtra and Gujarat. The irony of the situation was that water was not available to the untouchables at the place where the conference was being held. It had to be purchased from the upper caste Hindus in that locality. The

conference started at noon and Dr. Ambedkar in his Presidential address called upon the untouchables to not only stand up and assert their rights as human beings but also make earnest efforts to improve their lot by educating their children. He told them to give up such bad habits as eating of rotten flesh or food thrown away by the high caste Hindus. He also urged them to agitate for the removal of the ban imposed on the entry of the untouchables into the army and the police, as military service not only provided an excellent opportunity for improving their economic status but also gave them an opportunity to improve the educational standards of their children. There was compulsory primary education in the military camps for the dependents of army personnel irrespective of caste or creed. The conference passed several important resolutions. In one resolution it appealed to the upper castes to help the untouchables in securing their rights, to open avenues of employment for them and offer food to untouchable students. It also appealed to the Government to make the Bole Resolution effective by asking the local bodies and municipalities to enforce it by invoking Section 144 of the Indian Criminal Procedure, if necessary. It was also decided that the conference delegates should visit the Chawdar tank in order to ensure that the untouchables were allowed to draw water from the tank, which was a public place. They should claim their right to do so in consonance with the Bole resolution. The delegates staged a peaceful march to the tank in the morning of March 20, 1927 and asserted their right to take water from it. It may also be noted that although the upper caste Hindus did not mind the Muslims and Christians taking water from the tank, they did not allow the untouchables who belonged to the Hindu religion and worshipped the same Gods and Goddesses as the upper caste Hindus, to do so. The peaceful march was an important event in the history of the untouchables of our country. It was the first occasion when they had stood up for their rights in such large numbers. The procession reached the tank and Dr. Ambedkar was the first to take water from the tank and drink it, followed by the entire procession. The delegates then returned peacefully to the conference *pandal*. This was naturally resented by some of the more orthodox and bigoted among the upper caste Hindus. So they spread a rumour that the untouchables were also planning to enter the local temple. Rumours spread fast and people were taken in by them. Large crowds of people including the anti-social elements armed with bamboo sticks first collected at street corners and

later stormed the *pandal* of the conference. At that time many of the delegates had gone to the town in small groups. Some were busy in packing up their belongings while others were busy finishing their meals before leaving for their native places. In fact, the majority of the delegates had by then actually left the town and only a few were in the *pandal*. The crowd pounced upon the small number of delegates in the *pandal*. They threw away their food on the ground and beat up some of them, causing utter confusion. This sent a wave of panic among the untouchables of the town. Some of them were also beaten up by the rowdies and many of them had to take shelter in the house of their Muslim neighbours. The local police inspector went to inform Dr. Ambedkar at 4 O'Clock on 20-3-1927 at the Dak Bangalow where he and his party were staying. Dr. Ambedkar hurried to the *pandal* with a few of his colleagues. On the way, a group of rowdies surrounded him but he kept his temper under control. He told them calmly that there was no desire nor any plan on the part of the delegates attending the conference to enter the local Hindu temple. After this, he was allowed to proceed to the *pandal*, where he saw things for himself before returning to the Dak Bangalow. By this time, about 20 untouchables had been seriously injured and a doctor had to be called to attend to them.

Not content with what they had done to the delegates in the *pandal*, the anti-social elements then started marching up and down the streets of the town assaulting the members of the depressed classes. They even went to the extent of sending some of the ruffians in pursuit of the delegates who were peacefully walking back to their villages after attending the conference. Many of them were way-laid and beaten up.

These incidents sent a wave of indignation among the untouchables of Maharashtra in particular and the untouchables of the entire country in general. It was worth mentioning that although many of the delegates who were still in Mahad were seething with anger at the brutal treatment meted out to them and their comrades by the upper caste rowdies, Dr. Ambedkar pacified them and asked them to act with restraint and not to retaliate. He told them that peace had to be maintained at all costs. Thus this historic struggle was totally non-violent, disciplined and constitutional. Perhaps, Dr. Ambedkar had been deeply impressed by the technique of peaceful disobedience movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi and had seen its merits.

This is another proof of the catholicity of thought and open mindedness of Dr. Ambedkar.

On the night of March 20, 1927 Dr. Ambedkar and his party had to leave the Dak Banglow as it had been booked for a visiting Government officer. They had to find shelter in the police station where enquiry into these incidents was in progress and had to be completed before returning to Bombay.

As a result of the painstaking investigation made by Dr. Ambedkar he gathered facts which he narrated to the police authorities. The administration was compelled to arrest some of the rowdies. Five of them were sentenced by the District Magistrate to four months rigorous imprisonment on June 6, 1927.

The Mahad conference affected Dr. Ambedkar's personal life dramatically and deeply and influenced the social and national events of the future. In this respect, it can be compared to the partition of Bengal in 1905, Lok Manya Tilak's role of the Surat Congress in which he declared complete independence as the sole aim of the Indian National Congress, Mahatma Gandhi's Dandi March of 1930 and Netaji Bose's war of Liberation of 1943. The peaceful struggle at Mahad made the untouchables realise the value of getting organised and actively struggle for their rights as members of the Indian Society and for being treated like their compatriots. This also made even the more orthodox of the Hindus realise that they could not longer suppress the strong urge of the untouchables for being treated with decency and as equals. Actually this feeling had taken firm roots in the minds of the untouchables after the historic Mahad Conference. It can be claimed that the Mahad incidents pushed the struggle of the depressed classess ahead by 50 years although it lasted barely for a few days.

Till the time Dr. Ambedkar returned to Bombay on March 23, 1927 the members of his family were naturally deeply anxious about his safety. His elder brother even went to the extent of admonishing Dr. Ambedkar and advising him to mind his own business and not get involved in such troubles. The Mahad struggle started a controversy throughout the country. But its impact on the Bombay Presidency was the greatest. Several articles were written in the newspapers, some condemning the struggle as an over-zealous one; and some praising it. The upper caste Hindus were divided into two camps: the more enlightened ones supported the struggle and urged upon the

Government of the Bombay Presidency to make the Bole Resolution effective. Others condemned the whole incident as a heinous crime on the part of the untouchables. The only leader of national eminence who supported Dr. Ambedkar's struggle was Veer Savarkar. He went to the extent of saying that untouchability must not only be condemned but completely abolished. He praised the Satyagraha at Mahad and openly declared that it was the bounden duty of the Hindu society as a whole to restore full human rights to the untouchables who were as much Hindus as the so-called upper castes.

Even at Mahad, there were a few upper caste Hindu Leaders like Bapurao Joshi, Sashrabuddhe, and Namasahib Surba Tipnis who openly supported the peaceful struggle and earned the scorn of the more orthodox Hindus of the town. They scoffed at the ceremony held for the so-called purification of the tank which was organised by the more orthodox of the Hindus and in which cow dung, cow urine, milk and curd in 108 earthen pots were dipped in the tank amidst the chanting of *mantras* by Brahmin priests.

Publication of Journal for Untouchables

Realising the need to have a proper forum for expressing his views, Dr. Ambedkar started his fortnightly Marathi Paper *Bahishkrit Bharat* on April 3, 1927 in Bombay. The main purpose of this fortnightly paper was to keep the depressed classes well informed about the happenings in the land and also to make his views known to such upper caste Hindus who might be of a more enlightened bent of mind. Every issue of this fortnightly carried an editorial written in his inimitable style, appealing to the Government to make the Bole Resolution duly effective and to punish those who opposed its implementation. He also posed many penetrating and thought-provoking questions before his upper caste co-religionists. If eating meat and beef made some Hindus untouchables, why was this not applied to the Christians and Muslims and also why some of the communities who never touched meat were categorized as untouchable? He also taunted those upper caste Hindus who asked the British Government to act in a democratic manner and to treat Indians as equals, and at the same time were against a similar treatment being given to the untouchables, although they were as good Hindus as themselves. He even went to the extent of stating in one of his editorials that had Lok Manya Tilak been born an untouchable, he would have raised the slogan: "Annihilation of

notion of high born and low born and not the Brahmin community as such. He even went to the extent of declaring that in non-Brahmin communities persons with notions of self-exaltation by virtue of possession of wealth and power were as inimical to him as a Brahmin full of self-righteousness because of his birth. With his sense of history and a deep understanding of great Indian culture, Dr. Ambedkar even quoted profusely from the Gita in his editorials to support his views in the *Bahishkrit Bharat*. While he agreed with Gandhiji that non-violence was the best way of achieving one's goals, Dr. Ambedkar added that as far as possible, non-violence should be the rule but the necessity of violence could not be ruled out. Here, it would be pertinent to recall that even Mahatma Gandhi approved the Indian Government's action in meeting violence with violence at the time of invasion of Kashmir by the Pakistanis in 1948.

In a retrograde step, the Mahad Municipality revoked its earlier resolution of 1924 by which it had declared the Chawdar Tank open to the depressed classes, on August, 4, 1927. This blatant act of defiance of the Bole Resolution of the Bombay Legislative Council naturally annoyed Dr. Ambedkar and his followers. At a meeting held on September 11, 1927, it was decided to offer Satyagraha for re-establishing the rights of the untouchables. Later on, December 25 and 26, 1927 were fixed as the dates for offering the *Satyagraha*. The announcement of the *Satyagraha* led to a barrage of bitterly hostile criticism from the more orthodox Hindus. Answering these people, Dr. Ambedkar said that the upper caste Hindus must bear in mind the fact that the depressed classes were fighting for their rights while remaining within the fold of the Hindu religion. He also told them that had he been thinking in terms of conversion to another religion, he and his followers could have done so without consulting any one else.

To Aim Low is a Crime

Dr. Ambedkar said: "Some men say that they should be satisfied with the abolition of untouchability only, leaving the caste system alone. The aim of abolition of untouchability alone without trying to abolish the inequalities inherent in the caste system is a rather low. not failure but low aim is a crime, let us probe the evil to its very roots and not be satisfied with mere palliatives to assuage our pain. If disease is not rightly diagnosed, the remedy will be useless and the cure may be delayed. Even if we suppose that the stigma of untouchability is wiped

out, what will be the status of the present day untouchables. At the most, they will be treated as *Shudras*. And what are the rights of the *Shudras*? The *Smritis* treat them as mere helots, and the *Smritis* are the guides of the caste Hindus in the matter of gradations in the caste system. Are you willing to be treated as *Shudras*? Are you willing to accept the position of helots?"

Self-help

He further added:

"That the caste system must be abolished if the Hindu society is to be reconstructed on the basis of equality, goes without saying. Untouchability has its roots in the caste system. They cannot expect the Brahmins to rise in revolt against the caste system. Also we cannot rely upon the non-Brahmins and ask them to fight our battle. Most of these are more interested in bringing the brahmins down rather than in raising the level of the suppressed classes. They too want a class of people on whom they can look down upon and have the satisfaction of not being quite the under-dogs of the society. This means that we ourselves must fight our battles, relying on ourselves'. untouchability has ruined the untouchables, the Hindus and ultimately the nation as a whole. The day the depressed classes gain their self-respect and freedom they would contribute not only to their own prosperity but by their industry, intellect and courage would also strengthen the prosperity of the nation. A religion which discriminates between one of its followers and another is partial and the religion which treats crores of its adherents worse than dogs and criminals and inflicts upon them insufferable disabilities is no religion at all. Religion is not the appellation or such an unjust order. Religion and slavery are incompatible'".

Patriotism, Nationalism and Secularism

Dr. Ambedkar's *patriotism*, and his dedication to the principles of *nationalism and secularism* was undoubted. He undertook a special journey to the famous fort of Raigad, the glorious symbol of the heroic fight put up by Chhatrapati Shivaji against Aurangzeb. He did so not because of any communal consideration, but because of the fact that he admired the bravery of Chhatrapati Shivaji who had the courage to fight, with a very small army, against the mighty Emperor Aurangzeb who spent almost 30 years of his life extending his kingdom in South.

As his biographers have mentioned, he was deeply moved at when he saw the ruins of the famous fort of Raigad. Even this humble act of pilgrimage by him and his followers to a place which symbolised the struggle of weak against the high and mighty, was not to the liking of the orthodox Hindus.

As the time went on, Dr Ambedkar got involved more and more in public activities. He started taking active interest in social work, even at the cost of neglecting his flourishing legal practice. He did so because he deeply felt that his work and mission were not to earn money or amass wealth but to bring about a complete transformation of the Hindu society. He wanted to secure for the so-called untouchables a place of honour in the *Hindu Society*, which had been unjustly denied to them because of historical distortions. As a Member of the Legislative Council of the Bombay Presidency, Dr. Ambedkar seized every opportunity to put forth his views on the subject in a forceful manner. An outstanding example of the various measures which Dr. Ambedkar took as a Member of the Legislative Council was the Bill introduced by himself on March 19, 1928 to amend the Bombay Hereditary Offences Act, 1874. According to this iniquitous act, the Mahars in Government service were required to work round the clock. If a Mahar in Government service absented himself from duty even on valid grounds like illness, he was under the law required to place the services of a member of his family at the disposal of the Government during his period of absence. Before introducing the Bill, Dr. Ambedkar prepared the draft of the Bill with his characteristic meticulousness. He moved the Bill in the Council on August 3, 1928 with an impassioned appeal to the Government, based on legal, financial and moral grounds to repeal this iniquitous piece of legislation. He spoke for almost two hours with all of logic, eloquence and reasoning at his command. The entire Legislative Council heard him without interruption. However, it was finally decided that the Bill moved by Dr. Ambedkar may be referred to a Select Committee comprising 23 members of the Council. The Council was asked to give its opinion on the Bill by the first week of June, 1929. It is indeed tragic that the Select Committee, which was packed either by orthodox, upper caste Hindus, or by staunch Muslims, opposed the Bill tooth and nail. Bitterly disillusioned and disappointed Dr Ambedkar stood up in the Council on July 24, 1929 and stated that the Bill may be withdrawn. His agony at the ignominious fate of a

measure which aimed to do away with gross injustice being done to the untouchables can be better imagined than explained.

In the meantime, Dr. Ambedkar had accepted the post of acting professor at the Government College of Law, Bombay, from June 1928. He was almost forced to accept the post. Having plunged deeply into social work and having become a member of the Bombay Legislative Council he could devote no time to his legal practice. Thus he had no other means of livelihood, and this post was the only means to keep himself and his family alive.

Simon Commission Arrives in India

In the same year, the Indian Statutory Commission, appointed by the then British Government (more popularly known as the Simon Commission) headed by Sir John Simon, reached Bombay in February 1928. The Commission comprised of only two members. Its coming to India was resented by all Indians, including the Congress Party, which staged hostile demonstrations on a countrywide scale leading to police firing in certain areas. A Conference convened by the Congress Party met in February and May 1928 and appointed a Committee under Pandit Motilal Nehru, the illustrious father of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, to draw up a Constitution for an independent India. It has to be acknowledged that this was the first Indian attempt at making the Constitution for the entire country. At the same time, a close scrutiny of the Constitution drafted by Motilal Nehru and his colleagues showed that the main aim of the Constitution was to bridge the gap between the Hindus and the Muslims of India which had been widening more and more during that period. However, very little thought had been given in that draft Constitution to the miserable plight of the downtrodden.

Some of the biographers of Dr. Ambedkar have strongly criticised Pandit Motilal Nehru and his colleagues for this obvious discrepancy or omission in the Constitution drafted by them. The possible reasons for this omission might be as follows. After centuries of living in amity and sharing common languages, common regional traditions and almost a common way of life, although following a different religion, the Muslims of India were gradually drawn into a separatist movement. Certain events in the beginning of the 20th century gave rise to a growing movement of separatism among the Muslims. Among them the most important ones were the deliberate policy of the British

Government to encourage the spirit of separatism amongst the Indian Muslims and to make them feel that they were not a part of the Indian nation; the overthrow and disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and later on the emergence of Kamal Attaturk Pasha in Turkey leading to a wave of anger and anguish amongst the Muslims all over the world including India and the launching of the Khilafat Movement (for the restoration of the Caliph's rule in Turkey) in India by the famous brothers, Maulana Shaukat Ali and Maulana Mohammed Ali, which even Mahatma Gandhi thought fit to join. In the circumstances mentioned above the concern of the Indian National Congress at the growing chasm between the Hindus and the Muslims of India was understandable. Hence it would be improper as well as unethical to criticise Pt. Motilal Nehru and his colleagues for not making a special mention of the untouchables in the draft Constitution prepared by them. We have to bear in mind the fact that despite all his vehement and outspoken utterances, Dr. Ambedkar or for that matter any other untouchable leader, never questioned the fact that they were an integral part of the Hindu society. What Dr. Ambedkar often asserted was that untouchables had as much faith in the Hindu religion as the upper castes and because of this, they were entitled to being treated at par with their co-religionists. The Indian National Congress had, therefore, no reason to make a special mention of the untouchables in its draft Constitution. The members of the drafting committee headed by a person of unquestionable ability and foresight, as well as embodiment of wisdom and patriotism like Pt. Motilal Nehru, had at that particular moment of our history every reason to believe that untouchables were a part of the Hindu society and a thought of breaking away from the Hindu-fold was farthest away even from the mind of such an outspoken, forthright and candid person as Dr. Ambedkar. However, as recent researches in history, particularly in the West have established that history can be divided under two distinct heads: Micro-history and macro-history; and that often micro-history or micro-historical events greatly influence macro-history or macro-historical events.

Temple Entry Movement in Nasik

The year 1930 was a milestone in the history of India. The British Government unleashed a wave of repression against the massive movement of passive resistance, civil disobedience and *Satyagraha*

launched by Mahatma Gandhi on March 12, 1930. A very large number of unarmed *Satyagrahees* were brutally killed by the British troops all over the country. It was also the year of the famous Dandi March of Mahatma Gandhi. Almost at the same time, Dr. Ambedkar started the Temple Entry movement in Nasik after three months of painstaking and meticulous preparations so characteristic of his style of functioning. The Satyagraha Committee of the depressed classes at Nasik had informed the trustees of the famous Kalaram Temple that a *Satyagraha*, totally non-violent in nature, would be started if the trustees did not allow the untouchables to enter the temple and to worship their God, Shri Rama. At the same time, in response to the call of the Satyagraha Committee, almost 15000 volunteers and representatives assembled in a specially erected *pandal* in a predominantly untouchable area of the city. It is worth emphasising that the volunteers included not only untouchables but also Brahmin individuals like Shri B.G. Kher who later on became the first Premier of the Bombay Province in 1937. On Sunday, March 2, 1930 the Conference opened at 10.00 a.m. under the presidentship of Dr. Ambedkar. The participants discussed in a very cool and calm manner the way in which the *Satyagraha* was to be conducted; the deliberations went on till 12.00 noon when the Conference adjourned to meet again in the afternoon. At 3.00 p.m. the Satyagrahees formed a row of four each and started a procession which stretched over a mile. As soon as the processionists came to the gate of the temple, the District Magistrate, the students and the police and the entire official entourage stood in front of the gate. They barred the entry into the temple. Frustrated in this attempt of theirs, the processionists marched to the famous Godawari Ghat where a meeting was held and it was decided to launch a non-violent struggle in front of the gates of the temple on the morning of March 3, 1930. The *Satyagrahees* squatted before the temple entrance, singing *bhajans* but a strong contingent of the Bombay police as well as of the Armed Police were posted at each gate along with two first class Magistrates as well as the District Superintendent of Police. This treatment meted out to those perfectly non-violent *Satyagrahees* moved even the heart of some of the enlightened upper-caste Hindus. The same evening a public meeting of these citizens of Nasik was held under the presidentship of Dr. Kurtakoti, the local *Shankaracharya* to voice their sympathy for the *Satyagrahees*. However, the voice of sanity was stifled by that of


orthodoxy and the meeting ended in utter confusion. Notwithstanding these incidents, the perfectly non-violent *Satyagraha* continued for a long time. April 9, 1930 was the day when the image or statue of Shri Rama in the Kalaram Temple was to be taken out in a procession in an open chariot. Thanks to the wisdom and foresight of the enlightened persons among the upper caste Hindus, a compromise was arrived at between the upper caste Hindus and the untouchables. It was agreed that physically strong men of both the untouchables as well as upper caste Hindus would jointly pull the chariot. However, again the more orthodox upper caste Hindus most blatantly broke this reasonable agreement. Before the untouchables could reach the chariot, some of the upper caste Hindus physically pulled the chariot away. This was done with the connivance of the local British Magistrate because the miscreants and the betrayers of this compromise had the protection of the armed police. Not content with what they had done, the more obscurantist Hindus of Nasik went to the extent of expelling children of the untouchables from schools, closing the roads to them and not allowing them even to buy the articles of their daily needs from the local markets. Even the untouchables in several neighbouring villages were not spared. They were subjected to harsh treatment, including physical violence. Despite these provocations, Dr Ambedkar successfully kept his fellow *Satyagrahees* under check and did not allow them to retaliate. In the meantime, people like Dr. Moonje and the local *Shankaracharya* made earnest attempts to heal the breach and even the great industrialist the late Shri Ghanshyam Das Birla met Dr. Ambedkar in Bombay some time in the middle of 1930. However, these efforts of the enlightened upper caste Hindus failed to achieve their purpose. The temple continued to be closed to the untouchables till 1935.

Even while the 'Nasik Satyagraha' was on, the leaders of the depressed classes had plans of holding an all-India meeting as soon as the report of the Simon Commission was out. A Committee was accordingly set up for a meeting to be held at Nagpur. It was also agreed upon to depute Dr. Ambedkar as the sole spokesman of the depressed and downtrodden classes at the forthcoming Round Table Conference to be held in London. The Report of the Simon Commission was made public in May, 1930. It was blatantly anti-Indian. It not only completely ignored the Report meticulously drafted by a Committee headed by the late Pt. Motilal Nehru but also went to

the extent of advocating the continuation of separate electorates in India on the ostensible ground of an "agreed pact" among the different Indian political parties. A most sinister aspect of the Simon Commission Report was its recommendation that 150 seats may be allocated to the Hindus out of a total of 250 in the Central Legislature, and that the untouchables may be included in this Hindu quota. But it made a peculiar stipulation that no candidate of the depressed classes may be allowed to contest election unless his fitness was certified or testified by the Governor of the concerned province.

The first session of the All India Depressed Classes Congress was held at Nagpur on August 8, 1930, under the presidentship of Dr. Ambedkar. In his presidential address, he stated in a forthright manner that if multi-lingual multi-racial and multi-religious countries like Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and the USSR could be considered as nations, he did not see any valid reason why the British Government was not prepared to treat India as a nation. This unambiguous statement of Dr. Ambedkar expressed his staunchly secular and nationalistic outlook. He also came down heavily upon the stupid stipulation made by the Simon Commission about the certification of a candidate of the depressed classes. While he expressed his disagreement with Gandhiji's Movement of Civil Disobedience, he did not at all spare the British Government in his speech and aptly called the British Government in India as the costliest Government in the world. With his phenomenal memory for facts and figures, he stated: "In the first quarter of the century when British Rule in India had become an established fact, there were five famines with an estimated loss of 1,00,000 lives. During the second quarter, there were six famines with a loss of lives of 5,00,000. And during the last quarter of the century what do you find? 18 famines with an estimated loss of life ranging from 1,50,00,000 to 2,60,00,000 people." Nothing could be more scathing by way of criticism of the British Government than these statistics quoted by Dr. Ambedkar. He went on to tell the untouchables and the downtrodden that all the wrongs being heaped upon the untouchables and the downtrodden that all the British Raj continued in India. He asked them to fight for "Swaraj" for India as a whole. Again, with his deep incisiveness, Dr. Ambedkar stated that political power by itself cannot pave the way for their liberation and strongly advocated social upliftment and reform as the sole and ultimate panacea for their liberation from the various kinds of humiliation and injustice to which they had been subjected. The

concluding part of Dr. Ambedkar's speech at Nagpur was indeed memorable. He said: "The movements of social reform will result in the emancipation of our people and the establishment of such a state of society in this country of ours in which one man will have one value in all domains of life, political, social and economic." What is more interesting to note was the fact that even being himself subjected to all possible injustices by the accident of his birth and being acutely conscious of similar injustices which were being perpetrated on the so-called untouchables for long years, Dr Ambedkar again in very unambiguous terms declared in his presidential address at Nagpur that he would not abjure or leave the Hindu religion despite all the hardships which might be inflicted upon himself by the upper caste Hindus. The physical strain and the mental anguish he had undergone both in making the preparations for the Nagpur Congress and bitterness with which he criticised not only the upper caste Hindus but also the British Government, took a heavy toll of his health. He suddenly fell ill and became unconscious. People around him state that even in this condition he kept mumbling all the time about the dreams he had of an independent and united India with a free and egalitarian society:



CHAPTER VI

THE CONFERENCE AND THE PACT: THEIR IMPACT

Round Table Conference (R.T.C.)

Having noticed the hostile country's wide reaction to the Simon Commission Report, the British Government made a declaration for convening a Round Table Conference in London. It was to be attended by the representatives of the different political parties of India, the British Government and the British political parties. It was a desperate effort by the British Government to frame a constitution for India with the object of pacifying the growing upsurge in the country against the British rule. Fifty three Indians were invited representing different shades of public opinion to attend the conference. In addition to these, twenty ruling princes of the then Indian States were also invited. Among those invited were thirteen eminent Hindu Liberal leaders including the late Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, late Sir M.R. Jayakar, late Sir Chiman Lal Setalwad, late Right Hon. Srinivasa Sastri and late Shri C.Y. Chintamani. As for Muslims, His Highness the Agha Khan, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Fazlul Haque and Sir Mohd. Shafi were invited. Sardar Ujjwal Singh was asked to represent the Sikhs, Dr. V.S. Moonje to represent the Hindu Mahasabha and Shri T.K. Paul the Indian Christians. Dr. Ambedkar and Rao Bahadur Srinivasan were invited to represent the depressed classes. Dr. Ambedkar received the formal invitation to attend the R.T.C. through the Viceroy on September 6, 1930. He left Bombay on October 30, 1930 and reached just in time to attend the opening of the R.T.C. on November 12, 1930 in London. The R.T.C. was inaugurated by the then King Emperor of Great Britain, King George V. In the concluding part of his speech, the

King Emperor stated: "May your names go down in history as those of men who served India well". After the King Emperor's speech and his exit from the hall, Sir Ramsay MacDonald was elected as the Chairman of the R.T.C. MacDonald was a Labour leader sympathetic to the oppressed classes of India. He stated in unequivocal terms the determination of the British Government to solve the Indian problem and to usher in a new era in Indo-British relations. In the course of this historic conference, many memorable speeches were made. I would like to make a special mention of an excerpt from the speech made by the late Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, he said: "India wants and is determined to achieve a status of equality with all the members of the British Commonwealth viz: Australia, Canada and New Zealand and equality which will give it a Government not merely responsive but responsible to the popular voice."

Dr. Ambedkar made a memorable speech on the occasion. He said: "While I want to emphasise the fact that one fifth of the total population of British India—a population as large as the population of Britain—has been reduced to a position worse than that of serfs or slaves. However, I maintain that the untouchables in India were also for replacing the existing Government by a Government of the people, for the people and by the people". Further on, in his speech Dr. Ambedkar posed some direct and inconvenient questions to the British Government. "When we compare our present position with the one in pre-British days, we find that, instead of marching on, we are marking time. Before the British, we were in the loathsome condition due to our untouchability..... Has the British Government done anything to remove it?..... Our wrongs have remained as open sore and they have not been righted, although 150 years of British rule have rolled away. Of what good is such a government to anybody?..... We must have a Government in which the men in power will give their undivided allegiance to the best interests of the country. We must have a Government in which men in power know where obedience will end and the resistance will begin; will not be afraid to amend the social and economic code of life which the dictates of justice and expediency so urgently call for." Dr. Ambedkar's speech caused a consternation both among the British as well as the Indian delegates who were towing a moderate line. In the concluding part of his speech, Dr. Ambedkar quoted from Edmund Burke, the well known British political philosopher who said that: "The use of force is but temporary", and

sounded a stern warning to the British Government as well as the other participants of the R.T.C. in the following words: "I am afraid, it is not sufficiently realised that in the present temper of the country, no constitution will be workable which is not acceptable to the majority of the people. The time when you were to choose and India was to accept, is gone, never to return. Let the consent of the people and not the accident of logic be the touchstone of your new constitution, if you desire that it should be worked."

Dr. Ambedkar's frank and forthright speech caused a stir not only among the delegates of the RTC but also the British Government and even the British Prime Minister was deeply impressed by it. The Maharaja of Baroda, who was also a delegate to the R.T.C. was so deeply touched by Dr. Ambedkar's speech that he invited him to a special dinner. Most of the British newspapers also were compelled to sit up and take notice of this brilliant piece of oratory and impeccable logic on the part of Dr. Ambedkar. English politicians and statesmen like Lord Sydenham, O' Dwyer and others who had earlier harboured overt or covert suspicion regarding Dr. Ambedkar's bonafides were compelled to accept that he was not only a true Indian patriot and nationalist but was also one of the revolutionary leaders of his country. It is on record that a secret enquiry was made by the then British Government to find out whether Dr. Ambedkar was in fact a revolutionary or an extremist of the ilk of Veer Savarkar and others.

It is significant to note that after the preliminary session in the R.T.C. nine Sub-Committees were formed and Dr. Ambedkar found a place in every important Sub-Committee except the Federal Structure Committee. Another important fact is that Dr. Ambedkar held in depth discussions with Dr. Moonje and both of them arrived at the same conclusion in respect to the rights of the depressed classes. They made a joint declaration to the British and American journalists who were covering the R.T.C. They announced that there was no reason for the depressed classes to disagree with or disassociate themselves from their co-religionists. The Declaration of Fundamental Rights drafted by Dr. Ambedkar, for protecting the cultural, religious and economic rights of the depressed classes in the future independent India was fully acceptable to the Hindu leaders, in particular Dr. Moonje. All through the R.T.C. Dr. Ambedkar applied his mind with his typical incisiveness and clarity to each and every debate. The famous British newspaper, the *Sunday Chronicle* paying a tribute to his efforts wrote:

"At heart a true nationalist, he had to put up a stern fight against the persuasive coquetry of the British diehards who were anxious to win him over to their side and at the same time his task was made more difficult by his anxiety to retain his brother delegate Rao Bahadur Srinivasan within the nationalist fold".

The R.T.C. was in fact only partially successful in achieving its avowed objectives. The most positive point which emerged out of the R.T.C. was the evolution of a concept of a free, united, independent India, in spite of the determined efforts of the Muslim delegates to ask for a separate status for the Indian Muslims. However, the R.T.C. failed in a big way because of the disagreement on the question of allocation of seats which the different communities tried to secure for themselves in the proposed legislatures. They also had differences on the system of election and were divided on the question whether there should be separate electorates or joint electorates with reservation of seats. The most important factor which made this R.T.C. inconclusive was its boycott by the Indian National Congress. It had, therefore, to be adjourned. Dr. Ambedkar left for India early in February 1931 and reached Bombay on February 27, 1931 where he was given a most enthusiastic welcome by the members of the depressed classes.

Gandhi-Irwin Pact

After the first R.T.C., the political situation in the country underwent a sea change. Acting on the suggestion of the British Prime Minister, the Viceroy ordered the release of the imprisoned Congress leaders on January 26, 1931. Mahatma Gandhi after long-drawn negotiations with the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, announced a pact with the Government of India on March 5, 1931 stating that the Indian National Congress would suspend its Civil Disobedience Movement and was willing to attend the next session of the R.T.C.

Almost at the same time, the Government of Bombay announced that the Police Department was open for recruitment to the depressed classes. This goes to the credit of Dr. Ambedkar who as a Member of the Bombay Legislative Council had fought ceaselessly for the entry of the untouchables both in the Police and the Indian Army. His untiring efforts at last bore fruit.

Another significant development at that time was a distinct change in the attitude of the Indian National Congress to the political situation in the country. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who was one of the more

radical leaders of the Congress, addressed a meeting in Madras in which he stated that the Congress had not, and could not have labelled the delegates to the R.T.C. as traitors, as some Congressmen were making them out to be. At the same time, as stated earlier Gandhiji agreed to attend the next session of the R.T.C. In the third week of July 1931, the names of the delegates to the second session of the R.T.C. were announced by the British Government. They were: Dr. Ambedkar, Right Hon. Srinivasa Sastri, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Sir M.R. Jayakar, Sri Chimanlal Setalvad, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Smt. Sarojini Naidu, Mahatma Gandhi, Sir Mirza Ismail, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Sir Ramaswamy Mudaliar, to mention the most prominent ones. As stated earlier Dr. Ambedkar was deliberately kept out by the Britishers from the Federal Structure Committee in the first session of the R.T.C. because of his staunch patriotic attitude and his stand for an undivided, united and independent India. However, at the second R.T.C. he was entrusted with the extremely important task of drafting the new constitution for India. Even persons and newspapers who were earlier openly and almost vitriolically hostile to him now began to understand and appreciate his unquestionable patriotism. The *Indian Daily Mail* wrote: "He is a patriot and is rightly interested in securing his Government. In the future discussions which will centre on the franchise, on the Senate and the Federal Assembly, this brilliant representative of the depressed classes is certain to play a most important part". Similar praise was showered upon Dr. Ambedkar by papers like *Kesari* which were earlier hostile to him, and persons of eminence as the famous social worker and socialist leader, the late N.M. Joshi.

Mahatma Gandhi after having been released from jail, was trying to consult as many persons as possible in order to seek their views on the attitude to be adopted by the entire Indian delegation at the next R.T.C. It was characteristic of Mahatma Gandhi's openmindedness that he wrote a letter to Dr. Ambedkar on August 6, 1931, stating that he would himself call on Dr. Ambedkar at 8 o'clock that very evening if it was convenient to the latter. Dr. Ambedkar, who had just returned from a visit to Sangli and was running temperature, immediately sent back a letter to Mahatma Gandhi through a messenger at 'Manibhavan', Malabar Hills where Gandhiji was staying that he would himself call on Gandhiji at the appointed time. However, by the evening his temperature had gone up very high. In that febrile

condition, Dr. Ambedkar addressed another note to Mahatma Gandhi saying that he would call upon him as soon as he recovered from his fever. Finally Dr. Ambedkar met Gandhiji on August 14, at 2.00 p.m. At that time, Gandhiji was engaged in a discussion with some persons, including Miss Slade (more popularly known as Mira Behan). Soon Gandhiji noticed Dr. Ambedkar and the two started a very frank discussion in which they stated their respective views with their characteristic candidness. It goes to the credit of Mahatma Gandhi that he made the following statement about Dr. Ambedkar:... "From the reports that have reached me of your work at the Round Table Conference, I know you are a patriot of sterling worth."

On Saturday August 15, 1931, almost all the delegates for the second Round Table Conference left by ship from Bombay. However, Mahatma Gandhi had not agreed to attend this R.T.C. and because of him Mrs. Sarojini Naidu and Mahamana Madan Mohan Malaviya also cancelled their passages. The remaining delegates reached London on August 29, 1931. Unfortunately, Dr. Ambedkar was laid up with an attack of influenza coupled with vomiting and diarrhoea which persisted till September 7, 1931 the day the second R.T.C. was to open. In the meantime, Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Patel, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and others had met the Viceroy at Simla as a result of which Mahatma Gandhi agreed to attend the R.T.C. So accompanied with Smt. Naidu, Madan Mohan Malaviya and his other colleagues he left for London on August 29, and reached there on September 12, 1931.

The eyes of the entire world were fixed on the almost mystical figure of Mahatma Gandhi, who was attending the R.T.C. for the first time. The most important tasks of the R.T.C. were to be done by the Federal Structure Committee and the Minorities Committee. The conference was also given the mandate to re-examine and amplify the reports which had been prepared by the different committees of the first session of the R.T.C. Gandhiji in his first speech in the conference on September 15, 1931, in the Federal Structure Committee, claimed that the Indian National Congress was the sole representative of all Indian interests, religions and castes. His argument was based on the fact that Muslims, Hindus, people belonging to the depressed classes, Christians, Parsis, and others are not only its active members but also holding or having held important positions in his Party. Gandhiji even went to the extent of assuring the Indian princes that the Congress had refrained from any interference in the internal affairs of any of the

Indian princely states. Gandhiji went on to say that his party also stood for the rights of the Indian women because it had Dr. Annie Besant and Smt. Sarojini Naidu as its presidents.

Far Ahead of his Times

Dr. Ambedkar with his inborn temperament of rationality and logic made his speech in reply to Gandhiji's speech in the Federal Structure Committee on the same day i.e. September 15, 1931. He bluntly told the Indian princes that the Federal Structure Committee could not give them everything that they wanted including total non-interference in the internal affairs of their States. He went on to say that before an Indian princely state was allowed to join the contemplated Federation of India, it should be in a position to prove beyond doubt that it had the necessary resources as well as the capacity to provide its citizens/subjects a civilized life. Another important point which was made by Dr. Ambedkar in his speech was that the State's representative to be elected to the proposed Federal Assembly should be chosen by franchise open to all and not by nomination by the rulers of the States. History proved Dr. Ambedkar to be far-seeing person in this respect. A few years before India became independent on August 15, 1947, every Indian State had an active branch of the Indian National Congress fighting for this very cause. However, Dr. Ambedkar was perhaps, like several others of his kind, far too ahead of his times. It was because of this reason the then ruler of the State of Bikaner immediately stood up in the meeting and stated that the Indian States could not be expected to sign a blank cheque. Answering the point made by the late H H. Sir Ganga Singh of Bikaner, Dr. Ambedkar stated that acceding to the demand made on behalf of the rulers would be against the basic tenets of freedom and democracy. It is to be conceded that this was in fact the first speech made in defence of the rights of the people of the then Indian princely states. Later on, persons of no less stature than the late Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel had to use even the force of the Indian army in order to ensure that the people of some of these princely states were liberated from their ageless bonds of slavery and serfdom. What is even more significant is the fact that in the early 1940s the Indian National Congress started an auxiliary organisation, named the States People's Congress in almost every State. Most of the Indian States banned this "unarmed army" of the Indian National Congress, and even a person

like the first Prime Minister of free India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, was actually put under arrest in 1945 when he tried to enter the State of Jammu and Kashmir in order to address that States' Peoples' Congress. The stand taken by Dr. Ambedkar proves that, by a quirk of nature, he had been born far ahead of his times.

The R.T.C. witnessed several verbal encounters between Dr. Ambedkar on the one side and Gandhiji on the other. Although, Gandhiji unequivocally supported the idea of a Federal Structure for independent India, he at the same time stood for the maintenance of *status quo ante* as far as the Indian States were concerned. He also disagreed with Dr. Ambedkar that there was any need to provide special representation to the untouchables. In his view the Indian National Congress was in a position to protect their rights as they belonged to the Hindu religion. At the same time, Gandhiji supported the reservation of seats in the proposed Central Legislative Council as well as State Provincial Assemblies for the Muslims. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya expressed the opinion that if the country had spent enough money to wipe out illiteracy in the country, the term "depressed classes" would have ceased to exist. Dr. Ambedkar, with his usual quick wit, pointed out to Pandit Malaviya that in spite of possessing some of the highest academic qualifications from well known centres of learning in U.S.A., Britain and Germany, he was still an untouchable. Pandit Malaviya had no answer to this hard-hitting statement of facts.

The first meeting of the Minorities Committee was held on September 28, 1931 and in his opening address, the British Prime Minister admitted that the problems of minorities in India was indeed a baffling one. After some discussion, a suggestion was made by Sir Agha Khan and Pandit Malaviya that further discussion might be postponed. Making his position clear Dr. Ambedkar stated that while he had no objection to the secret talks which were going on between the Congressmen and the Muslim leaders, he would not allow the Congressmen to decide the fate of depressed classes and that any settlement between the Congressmen and the Muslim leaders would not be binding on him and the depressed classes. His speech was characterized by his usual eloquence and logic and the chairman, Sir Ramsay MacDonald, the British Prime Minister had to say: "Dr. Ambedkar has made his position absolutely clear in his usual splendid way. He has left no doubt at all about it."

On October 1, 1931, Gandhiji again asked for a week's adjournment of the deliberations of the Minorities Committee and informed that he was holding talks with Muslim leaders. On hearing this statement of Gandhiji, Dr. Ambedkar stated that while he had no desire to create any problem in the way of an amicable settlement of the Hindu-Muslim question, he enquired if the depressed classes would also be represented on the formal committee which Gandhiji was thinking of constituting for this purpose. Gandhiji straightaway assured Dr. Ambedkar that this would be done and Dr. Ambedkar thanked Gandhiji with his usual courtesy. In the initial stage of the one week period of adjournment of the Minorities Committee, the talks between Gandhiji and the Muslim leaders progressed satisfactorily since Gandhiji, in a desperate bid to maintain the country's unity conceded to almost all the major demands of the Muslim delegates. However, the talks broke down on the Sikh-Muslim question; and on October 8, Gandhiji was compelled to announce with deep anguish in his voice before the Minorities Committee, his failure to secure a solution acceptable to all in respect of the communal problem. He, therefore, urged that the meeting of the Minorities Committee may be adjourned *sine die*. Dr. Ambedkar on hearing it made some scathing remarks, since Gandhiji in his speech, obviously delivered under great emotional stress, had ascribed the failure to the fact that most of the members present at the R.T.C. were not the true representatives of the parties or groups. Dr. Ambedkar in his reply took particular exception to this remark of Gandhiji. The argument reached a stage when the British Prime Minister himself had to intervene and made an earnest appeal to the delegates not to ascribe motives or to attribute causes to the method or mechanism by which they had been selected or elected to attend this R.T.C. Sir Ramsay MacDonald was pungent in his criticism of Gandhiji.

Some well wishers of the two greatmen tried to bridge the gulf between Gandhiji and Babasaheb Ambedkar by inviting both the leaders to tea. At this meeting, Dr. Ambedkar had the humility and generosity to openly acknowledge in the presence of the common friends that he could not deny the fact that Gandhiji had been doing work for the upliftment of the untouchables in his own humanitarian way. He was also sincerely striving to abolish the stigma of untouchability from the Hindu society. However, he maintained that although both of them agreed on this burning question, their

individual approach or point of view on the best way of solving the problem had some fundamental difference.

By the end of October 1931, the Labour Government was defeated and the Tories came to occupy the seats of power. On November 5, His Majesty King George V gave a reception at Buckingham Palace. Gandhiji attended the reception clad in his typical loin cloth and was contemptuously called by Sir Winston Churchill as the "naked fakir". Dr. Ambedkar was also present at this reception. When the King Emperor asked him to acquaint him with the conditions of the untouchables in India, Dr. Ambedkar presented a graphic picture of the miserable conditions to which this vast section of population of India had been subjected to for centuries. A well known biographer of Dr. Ambedkar has stated that on hearing Babasaheb's heart-rending narration, the King Emperor was visibly moved.

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《中国音乐史》（五卷本）

अनुरोध प्रमाणिक सांख्यिकीय तथ्या

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 कर्ण विन्ध्य, के. टी.
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बालर-शानिभार करील ११ दिवेंबर सन १९३१ इ.स.वी.

[अंक ७ वा.]

गांधी-आंबेडकर-पंचम जार्ज मुलाखत.

आयुष्मान् अर्जुनः—**श्री.** अभिरुद्राणि वन. देवैः
प्रेषितं वन. अभिरुद्राण्य रात्र्युदयत. छात्रैः
अनन्यतः. ए. ए. अभिरुद्राणि अभिरुद्र. वन,
आयुष्मान् अर्जुनः.

डॉ. अविदकरांचे पत्र.

(ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय)

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॥ श्रीगणेशाय नमः ॥
 ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ।

ਸਾਡੀ ਵਿਧਾਨੀ 'ਚ ਆਪਣੇ ਹੋਰ ਕਾਨੂੰਨਾਂ ਦੀ
ਵਿਧਾਨੀ ਦੇ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਸਾਰੇ ਕਾਨੂੰਨਾਂ
ਦੀ ਵਰਤੋਂ।

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ये न सिद्धि प्राप्त कर सकें। अतः
कमल प्रकाश के अंतर्गत विज्ञान प्रकाश
प्रकाश के अंतर्गत विज्ञान प्रकाश
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Ambedkar and Gandhi

Some of the biographers of Dr. Ambedkar have described his differences with Gandhiji almost as a total war. This is not true. As has been stated earlier, Dr. Ambedkar in the presence of some common friends, who had arranged a meeting between him and Gandhiji, had openly admitted that he had no doubt at all about Gandhiji's sincerity in making efforts to remove the stigma of untouchability from

the Hindu society, although his own approach to solving this problem differed fundamentally from that of Gandhiji. We have to bear in mind that quite often when two great minds meet, there are likely to be some differences and disagreements. Smt. Indira Gandhi, while releasing the last two volumes of Gandhiji's complete works on April 30, 1984 aptly described him, as a "complex personality". The same holds true of Dr. Ambedkar. Both of them were men of deep convictions, and sincerity of purpose. It is, therefore, no wonder that they differed on several issues. It would, therefore, be most uncharitable to describe their differences of opinion as war or mutual hatred, between the two of them. Two great people can have genuine differences with each other.

We all know that differences of opinion existed between Gandhiji, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, Acharya Kripalani, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Shri Jai Prakash Narayan and Shri Rafi Ahmed Kidwai. In fact, Shri Kidwai even went to the extent of resigning from the Indian National Congress and forming an independent party called *Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party* and openly criticised Pt. Nehru at a meeting in the famous Ramlila Ground of Delhi. However, Shri Kidwai's relationship with Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru never reached a point of no return; and when Panditji asked him to come back to the fold of the Indian National Congress, he promptly agreed to the request of a person whom he considered as his elder brother. This is only to illustrate the fact that the difference between Gandhiji and Babasaheb Ambedkar cannot, and indeed should not, be characterised as a war or a battle. Both of them were persons of impeccable integrity, sincerity of purpose and following the same path. the removal of untouchability from the Indian society. But they did it in their own individual ways.

Poona Pact

The performance of Dr. Ambedkar in the R.T.C. made him a well known figure throughout the country as well as abroad. Even the most diehard of the Hindu leaders had to sit up and take note of his brilliant performance at the R.T.C., which had been acclaimed not only by the British but also the American Press. The British Premier had declared his award on the communal issue in India. As per provisions of the award, the depressed classes were granted separate seats in the Provincial Assemblies and the right of double vote under which they were to elect their own representatives and to vote also in the general

constituencies. This communal award had roots in balkanizing India politically, as it gave separate electorates to the Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and Europeans. It was, therefore, condemned by all the political leaders and the press.

Gandhiji had gone on a fast unto death on the issue of separate electorates for the depressed classes. Public appeals were made to Gandhiji, statements and requests were issued in all the leading newspapers in the country. According to Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Hinduism was on its trial. To save the life of Gandhiji, it was necessary to modify the award. Hectic parleys were held by the enlightened upper caste Hindu leaders in order to bring about a reconciliation between Dr. Ambedkar and Gandhiji, who had been again imprisoned by the British Government in the Yeravada jail. On September 22, 1932, a meeting was arranged between Gandhiji and Dr. Ambedkar in the jail at which Sir M.R. Jayakar, Shri G.D. Birla, Shri Chunilal Mehta and Shri C. Rajagopalachari were present. Gandhiji was lying in an extremely emaciated condition on an iron cot with a jail mattress spread over it, under a low mango tree. Sardar Patel and Mrs. Naidu were by his bed-side. The pervading atmosphere was that of gloom. Although deeply moved at the plight of Gandhiji, who was almost on his death-bed, Dr. Ambedkar controlled himself since the main purpose of this meeting, arranged by common well-wishers of both the leaders, was to bring about a mutually satisfactory agreement between Bapu and Dr. Ambedkar in regard to the difficult question of representation for the depressed classes in the proposed Federal Legislative Council and the Provincial Assemblies. One can well imagine the feelings of Dr. Ambedkar at that historic moment. Before his eyes was an almost mythical figure at the point of death, while in his own heart, he was determined to uphold the rightful claims of the depressed classes.

The conversation between Dr. Ambedkar and Gandhiji was held in an atmosphere almost reminiscent of a discussion between two saints. Dr. Ambedkar's logical arguments, couched in a most respectful tone, had a visible impact on Gandhiji. At this point it would not, perhaps, be out of place to mention that both Gandhiji and Dr. Ambedkar had an unusual mastery over spoken as well as written English and in spite of all their acute differences they could communicate with and understand each other on both intellectual and emotional planes. After hearing patiently Dr. Ambedkar's arguments, Gandhiji had the magnanimity to state: "You have my fullest sympathy. I am with you,"

Doctor, in most of the things you say. *But you say that what concerns you most is my life.*" Deeply moved by Gandhiji's statement, Dr. Ambedkar answered, "Yes, Gandhiji, in the hope that you would devote yourself solely to the cause of my people, and become our hero too" Gandhiji's reaction to Dr. Ambedkar's words was equally memorable. "Well then if it is so, then you know what you have got to do to save it (i e. my life). Do it and save my life. I know you do not want to forego what your people have been granted by the award. I accept your panel system but you should remove one anomaly from it. You should apply the panel system to all the seats. *You are untouchable by birth and I am by adoption.* We must be one and indivisible. I am prepared to give my life to avert the break-up of the Hindu community."

On hearing these touching words from a person like Bapu, Dr. Ambedkar could not but be deeply touched and immediately accepted Bapu's suggestion.

After this historic meeting between Dr. Ambedkar and Gandhiji, hectic discussions were started by the common friends who had attended the meeting to make Dr. Ambedkar agree to a formula of reservation of seats for the depressed classes. In the meantime, Gandhiji's health took a turn for the worse and he was almost on the verge of death. Taking note of this fact and being a pragmatist, Dr. Ambedkar finally agreed to the granting of 148 seats to the depressed classes in the provincial assemblies and also that 10 per cent of the Hindu seats from British India in the Central Assembly should be given to the depressed classes. However, he stuck to his stand on referendum for adult franchise for the untouchables in order to decide their own destiny. However, this was not acceptable to the common friends and well wishers. Dr. Ambedkar decided to see Gandhiji once again to discuss this matter. Accompanied by Dr. Solanki and C. Rajagopalachari he called on Gandhiji on Friday, the 23rd September, 1932. Gandhiji was again magnanimous enough to accede that. Although Dr. Ambedkar's logic was impeccable, he was of the considered opinion that more statutory guarantees would not root out the disease and he entreated Dr. Ambedkar to give the last chance to Hinduism for making a voluntary expiation of its sinful past and added that he was prepared that referendum on the issue may be held at the end of a period not exceeding five years. To quote the memorable words of Gandhiji during this meeting with Dr. Ambedkar: "Five years

or my life!" On returning from this meeting with Gandhiji, Dr. Ambedkar had thorough discussions with common friends, including C. Rajagopalachari at which it was decided to make the agreement without the condition of referendum attached to it. C. Rajagopalachari met Gandhiji in the jail in the afternoon the same day and Gandhiji gave his blessings to this settlement. C. Rajagopalachari rushed back to Shri Shivrul Motilal's bungalow and announced that Gandhiji had given his consent and blessings to this agreement. Speedily the agreement was drafted and signed at 5.00 p.m. on Saturday, September 24, 1932. It has gone down in the history of India as the famous Poona Pact. The signatories to this historic pact were Dr. Ambedkar, Pt Madan Mohan Malaviya, Sri M.R. Jayakar, Sir T.B. Sapru, Shri G.D. Birla, Shri C. Rajagopalachari, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Rao Bahadur Srinivasan, Shri M.C. Rajah, Shri Devadas Gandhi and some others. C. Rajagopalachari was so much overwhelmed by this historic development that after the pact was signed he exchanged his fountain pen with that of Dr. Ambedkar. As has been stated earlier, C. Rajagopalachari, although a Brahmin by birth, was a staunch supporter of the untouchables. He had played an important role in the historic Murgesan Temple entry case. Like Dr. Ambedkar, Pt. Nehru and Gandhiji, C. Rajagopalachari was all out for a complete transformation of the Hindu society and the abolition of the caste system. Although belonging to an orthodox south Indian Brahmin family, he allowed his daughter to marry Devadas Gandhi, the son of Gandhiji which was an ample proof of his deep inner conviction about a unified, casteless Hindu society. Like Ambedkar, he was also a man of strong convictions, and when the question of the partition of the country on Hindu-Muslim basis came up in the late 1930s-early 1940s, he and Dr. Ambedkar were the two persons who openly stated that since our country was going to be partitioned or dismembered solely on the basis of religion, it would be logical to ask for a wholesale exchange or transfer of Hindu and Muslim populations from India to Pakistan and vice versa.

The Poona Pact is yet another incident in Dr. Ambedkar's remarkable career, which made him the target of criticism by even some of his own people. Some of them even went to the extent of calling him the betrayer of the cause of the untouchables of the country. This was obviously a case of over reaction. Gandhiji's fast unto death against the communal award announced by the British Government after the

second R.T.C. should make any sensitive person visualize what could have been the feelings of Dr. Ambedkar when Gandhiji told him: "You are an untouchable by birth. I am an untouchable by adoption." These words coming out of the mouth of a truly saintly man like Gandhiji, and that too almost at his death-bed, could not but move Dr. Ambedkar. What Dr. Ambedkar did under the circumstances should be considered against this background.

The Poona Pact was brought to the notice of the British Cabinet by the Viceroy. On September 25, 1932 a meeting of prominent leaders was held at the Indian Merchant's Chamber Hall, Bombay which was chaired by Pt. Madan Mohan Malaviya. In his presidential address, he declared that no one should be considered an untouchable by accident of birth and made an impassioned appeal to the Hindus to see that untouchability disappears from the country. Shri Mathuradas Vasanji moved the resolution for the ratification of the pact. It was seconded by Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru. In his brilliant speech, Sir Tej Bahadur paid a great tribute to Dr. Ambedkar and congratulated him for his brave fight for the cause of the untouchables of our country. He expressed the view that Dr. Ambedkar would one day prove to be an equally good fighter for the future of the country. These words coming from a person of the erudition, wisdom and vast experience of Sir Tej Bahadur were indeed prophetic. It was now Dr. Ambedkar's turn to stand up and support the resolution moved by Pt. Malaviya. As soon as he stood up, the entire gathering gave him a spontaneous and tumultuous applause. In his speech, Dr. Ambedkar stated that the happenings of the previous day were beyond his dreams and added that he had never found himself in such a dilemma as he found himself on that day. With his characteristic humility, he gave the entire credit for bringing about an agreed settlement between him and Gandhiji to Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Shri C. Rajagopalachari. His anguish at the ordeal which Gandhiji had to pass through, was expressed in these words: "My only regret is, why did not Gandhiji take this attitude at the Round Table Conference? If he had shown the same consideration to my point of view then, it would not have been necessary for him to go through this ordeal." At the end of his speech, he expressed his earnest hope that the caste Hindus would faithfully abide by the terms of the pact and treat the document as sacrosanct.

The British Government announced on September 26, 1932 that the Poona Pact would be recommended to the British Parliament for being

endorsed. On hearing this, Gandhiji gave up his fast unto death.

In the meantime, the British Government announced the holding of the Third Round Table Conference and Dr. Ambedkar left for England on November 7, 1932. On board the ship taking him to London, Dr. Ambedkar spent most of his time reading books and newspapers. On going through the statements issued by Gandhiji from the Yeravada jail about the Harijan Movement, Dr. Ambedkar stated in the letters that he wrote back to his colleagues in India that he was happy to see that Gandhiji was coming round to his views. In one of these letters, he expressed the opinion that Gandhiji should not go on a fast unto death, as he was contemplating at that time, in regard to the question of entry into temples by the untouchables. He wrote a letter to Shri Thakkar, the general secretary of the Anti-untouchability League in which he made the following observation: "The touchables and untouchables cannot be held together by law, certainly not by any electoral law... The only thing that can hold them together is love. The salvation of the depressed classes will come only when the caste Hindu is made to think and feel that he must alter his ways. I want a revolution in the mentality of the caste Hindus." He, therefore, requested the Anti-untouchability League to start a mass movement all over India in order to help the depressed classes to secure the fullest enjoyment of their civil rights as equal citizens of the country, without which a social revolution and total transformation of the Hindu society and its integration was impossible. He stressed that only a positive and purposeful action in this direction, like his own temple entry *Satyagraha* at Nasik and the on-going temple entry movement in Malabar appear to have achieved, in a brief span of time what could not have been achieved by thousands of days of preaching.

Princes And Muslims In the Role of Reactionaries

The third R.T.C. opened on November 17, 1932. The Indian delegation at this R.T.C. was much smaller and the Congressmen had completely boycotted it, since Gandhiji was still in the jail. The Indian princes adopted a most indifferent attitude to the proceedings of the third R.T.C. However, what pained Dr. Ambedkar most was the attitude of the Muslim delegates who were not prepared to cooperate with the other Indian groups in the demand for a responsible Indian Government at the Centre, in spite of having secured practically all their major demands as embodied in their 14-point memorandum at the second R.T.C. Dr. Ambedkar was convinced that while the Muslim

delegates were acting as a solid, cohesive block, the Hindu delegates were hopelessly divided amongst themselves. He was also deeply pained to note that the Muslim delegates who professed Islam, a religion guaranteeing equal rights of worship to all the members within its fold, were secretly supporting the move of the more orthodox upper caste Hindus against granting the right of temple entry to the untouchables of India. In one of his letters written from London to a friend of his, Dr. Ambedkar mentioned that one of the prominent Muslim leaders at the third R.T.C. had received a cable from the orthodox Hindus of Bengal asking for Muslim support in opposing the temple entry movement. With his characteristic bluntness, Dr. Ambedkar stated in his letter, that to him the Indian Muslim was as strange a creature as an orthodox Hindu. Social reform was an anathema to both of them. Dr. Ambedkar went on to say in that letter that it would be helpful to the Indian Muslims if they could learn a lesson from the work done by Kamal Ataturk Pasha who almost overnight transformed Turkey from an intensely orthodox Muslim country into a most progressive one; although he was as good a Muslim as any other. In this matter too, Dr. Ambedkar had a truly prophetic vision.

The work of the third R.T.C. proceeded according to the schedule. Its main mandate was to supplement and complete the work done and to evaluate the reports drafted at the first and second R.T.Cs. The third R.T.C. decided by a majority that adult franchise for India was not practicable under the existing conditions but added that the franchise should be extended and also that a portion of the women population of India should be given the right to vote. A heartening outcome of the third R.T.C. was its recommendation that a provision may be made to enfranchise a larger portion of the depressed classes.

The third R.T.C. concluded on December 24, 1932, when most of the western countries and U.S.A. were in the grip of a severe economic crisis caused by recession. Dr. Ambedkar left for India the very next day, fully conscious that even the third R.T.C. had miserably failed in its basic purpose.

In the meantime, the temple entry movement, to which Gandhiji had totally committed himself, after his pact with Dr. Ambedkar was making a visible impact throughout India. It goes to the credit of Gandhiji that he made a public declaration to go on a fast with Kelappan on the issue of the entry of the untouchables into the famous Guruvayur temple, in the State of Calicut. The ruler of Calicut was

equally adamant on this issue and refused point blank to throw the gates of the temples open to the untouchables. Gandhiji in spite of his open declaration of going on a fast unto death on this issue made an alternative suggestion that if after a free referendum all the people of the Ponani taluka of Calicut, decided by majority against the entry of the untouchables into the Guruvayur temple, he would not go on his proposed fast unto death. However, strange as it might appear, the majority was in favour. But the prince of Calicut refused to yield. Faced with this situation, Shri Ranga Iyer, although himself an orthodox South Indian Brahmin, was compelled to introduce a bill in the Central Assembly, entitled "The Untouchability Abolition Bill", and similar bills were presented by some other members of the Central Assembly. On being appraised of these heartening developments, Gandhiji extended the time limit for starting his fast unto death upto January 1, 1933 and said that during this period, he would patiently await the decision of the Viceroy of India.

Temple Entry Bills Controversy

Dr. Ambedkar returned to Bombay on January 23, 1933. During the course of an interview that he gave soon after to a correspondent of *The Times of India*, he reiterated that the grant of responsible government to British India should not be linked with the willingness or otherwise of the Indian princes to join the proposed Federation of India. On the question of the temple entry bills, he expressed deep concern at the rumours which were being floated that the Viceroy was not likely to give permission to these bills in the Central Assembly and the Madras Legislative Council and added that such a step on the part of Viceroy would be against the norms or procedures of the legislative bodies. In so far as the announcement of Gandhiji's going on a fast unto death was concerned, he stated that in his opinion, Gandhiji should not stake his valuable life on an issue like this. Immediately on his return to Bombay, Dr. Ambedkar received a telegram from Gandhiji requesting him to see him in the Yeravada jail. However, in the meantime, an informal meeting of the delegates to the R.T.C. had been convened by the Viceroy in New Delhi and Dr. Ambedkar sent back a telegram to Gandhiji that he would call on him on his return from New Delhi. As soon as he came back to Bombay after attending this meeting, he sent a telegram to Gandhiji stating that he would be able to call on him on February 4, 1933, if it suited him.

Gandhiji promptly sent back a telegram stating that he would be glad to see him at 12.30 p.m. on February 4, 1933. Dr. Ambedkar accompanied by some of his friends, entered the Yeravada jail exactly at 12.30 p.m. Gandhiji was very happy to meet Dr. Ambedkar and the people accompanying him. He got up from his cot to greet them heartily. Gandhiji requested Dr. Ambedkar to give his full support to the bills in regard to the question of temple entry introduced by Dr. Subbarayan in the Madras Legislative Council and by Shri Ranga Iyer introduced in the Central Legislative Council. However, Dr. Ambedkar firmly but politely told Gandhiji that he would have nothing to do with Dr. Subbarayan's bill because it did not condemn untouchability as a sin and only stated that if referendum favoured temple entry, the temples should be thrown open to the depressed classes. Dr. Ambedkar went on to tell Gandhiji that the depressed classes were no longer prepared to be treated as *Shudras* or untouchables. Gandhiji pleaded with Dr. Ambedkar on this issue and stated that according to him the Hindu caste system was not a bad one. To quote him; "Let the touchable Hindus have an opportunity to expiate their sins and purify Hinduism. Sanatanists and Government would take advantage of this. If this reformation (i.e. the throwing open of temples to the untouchables), takes place, the untouchables would rise in society." However, Dr. Ambedkar politely but firmly disagreed with Gandhiji on this statement and stated that he was convinced that if the untouchables were allowed to make progress in the economic, educational and political fields, temple entry would follow automatically. It was, therefore, to him an irrelevant issue. In other words, he told Gandhiji with his characteristic firmness combined with politeness that untouchability could not be removed unless the caste system was removed from the Hindu society. He made his opinion public in a message which he gave to the first issue of *Harijan* started by Gandhiji on February 11, 1933, with the special aim to acquaint the country with the plight of the *Harijans*. In his message, Dr. Ambedkar stated: "The out-caste is a by-product of the caste system. There will be out-castes as long as there are castes. Nothing can emancipate the out-caste except the destruction of the caste system. Nothing can help Hindus and ensure their survival in the coming struggle against the British except purging the Hindu faith of this odious and vicious dogma". Gandhiji in his reply in the next issue of the *Harijan* stated that although many educated Hindus also hold the same view as had

been expressed by Dr. Ambedkar, he for one was not prepared to share it, being a firm believer in the caste system. This was in fact the parting of ways between these two great sons of India. While nobody can doubt Gandhiji's sincerity of purpose; in his efforts to remove the stigma of untouchability from the Hindu society, one has to agree though most reluctantly that his insistence on the perpetuation of the caste system was completely incompatible with his attitude towards the untouchables. It seems that although Gandhiji was a man of action, a humanitarian with sincerity of purpose, he also had a much stronger streak of emotionalism than of rationalism. It is also possible that his early upbringing as the son of the Dewan of a princely state where the caste system had always been held as sacrosanct and immutable, might have fixed his ideas firmly on this issue.

CHAPTER VII

THE GATHERING STORM

The 1930s witnessed the meteoric rise of Adolf Hitler on the European scene and he and his partymen took over power from the then legally established Government of Germany by brutal physical force. Hitler and his Nazi Party were not only out to avenge the indignities imposed upon Germany after its defeat in the first World War of 1914-18 but had also territorial ambitions of imposing German rule over as many countries as possible. Since the rise and fall of Hitlerism is not germane to this biography of Dr. Ambedkar, it would be sufficient to state here that Hitler terrorized the mighty British Government to sign the ignoble Munich Pact, by which Hitler was allowed to annex Austria. Emboldened by this abject surrender by the British Empire, Hitler attacked Poland on September 3, 1939 and the British Government was compelled to declare war on Germany. The Indian National Congress was undecided about the attitude it should adopt in this fight between the British Empire and the Germany of Hitler. In 1937, the British Government had accepted a major recommendation of the third R.T.C. and established Provincial Assemblies in all the provinces with an elected government headed by a Chief Minister who was directly responsible to the Governor of the concerned province. However, when it became clear to the Congressmen that Nazism or Fascism was a real danger to democracy, they were faced with a dilemma : whether to support the Imperial British Government in its war against Hitler and Mussolini or to make use of this opportunity to press their demands for a completely free India. The Issue was finally settled on August 9, 1942 when Gandhiji launched his famous Quit India Movement and was immediately imprisoned along with a large number of topmost Congress leaders and

workers in different jails throughout the country. Before that Subhash Chandra Bose had escaped from India and gone to Germany and thereafter to Japan and established the Indian National Army (I.N.A.) and gave our country its national slogan 'Jai Hind'.

It would be pertinent, at this stage, to go back to some of the important events preceding that era, with which Dr. Ambedkar was deeply involved. In March 1933, the British Government issued a White Paper comprising certain proposals for bringing about reforms in the Indian Constitution in accordance with the decisions made at the third R.T.C.; and this White Paper was to be considered by the Joint Committee of both Houses of the British Parliament, the House of Commons and the House of Lords. This announcement was denounced by most of the Indian leaders. Despite their individual differences, leaders like Quaid-e-Azam Jinnah, Subhash Chandra Bose, Dr. Moonje and Sir M.R. Jayakar condemned it. Soon after the announcement of the White Paper, the names of the delegates to be invited to the Joint Committee were announced by the British Government. seventeen persons were to represent British India, Indian States were to send seven and thirty two were to be selected from both the Houses of the British Parliament. Among the Indian delegates were. Dr Ambedkar, Sir T.B. Sapru, Sir M.R. Jayakar, Sir Mirza Ismail, His Excellency the Agha Khan and Sir Akbar Hydari. Before leaving for England, Dr. Ambedkar not only held hectic consultations with the other delegates and his own followers but also had an interview with Gandhiji in the Yeravada jail. He left for London on April 24, 1933, reaching there on May 6, 1933. Despite a very hectic schedule in London, Dr. Ambedkar made anxious enquiries from his friends in India about the state of health of Gandhiji and also kept in touch with developments at home. Even at a time when he was most busy, he did not forget to try to extend help to his old benefactor, Shri Keluskar, an enlightened Maharashtrian Brahmin who had been instrumental in getting Dr. Ambedkar introduced to the princes of Kolhapur and Baroda States in the days when the former was waging a struggle for higher education. Shri Keluskar was at that time an old man living in penury. Dr. Ambedkar sent a petition to the Maharaja of Baroda appealing him to grant Shri Keluskar a monthly pension so that this noble person could pass his last days in reasonable comfort. Such was the stuff of which Dr. Ambedkar's heart was made of.

Back in London

Soon on arrival in London, the Indian delegates to the Joint Committee had a formal conference at which it was decided to appoint a committee to expose before the British Government the defects, lacunae and shortcomings in the White Paper. At this meeting, Dr. Ambedkar told his fellow Indian delegates with deep anguish that he had been compelled to ask for separate electorates for the depressed classes because of the almost inhuman attitude of the upper caste Hindus. Dr. Moonje the well known Hindu Mahasabha leader not only agreed with Dr. Ambedkar's point of view but even went to the extent of offering him the presidentship of the Hindu Mahasabha.

What was most deplorable was the fact that the very Hindu leaders who had enthusiastically welcomed the Poona Pact had in the meantime started going back on the promise they had made. Even Rabindra Nath Tagore withdrew his support and Sir N.N.Sarkar actually produced a cable from Rabindra Nath Tagore supporting the anti-Poona pact stand adopted by the Bengal Hindus before the Joint Parliamentary Committee. The Assistant Secretary of State for India firmly told him that since the Poona Pact had the full and willing support of all Hindu leaders, it could not be held as nullified because of the inexplicable withdrawal of support by some of those who were a party to it. In the session of the Joint Parliamentary Committee held on October 23 and 24, 1933, Dr. Ambedkar cross-examined that awesome historic figure and an outstanding member of the British Parliament, Sir Winston Churchill. He put such penetrating questions to him that even a person considered to be having almost an absolute command of written and spoken English and a master in the art of repartee, perhaps for the first and only time in his long career, was almost made speechless. Such was the courage, fearlessness and logic with which Dr. Ambedkar was so richly endowed.

The Joint Committee finished its talks in November, 1933, supporting the White Paper and appointing a Sub-committee to draft the future constitution of India in accordance with the decision arrived at the meetings of the various committees. Dr. Ambedkar reached Bombay on January 8, 1934. In an interview he gave on his return to Bombay, he stated that although the Joint Committee might possibly modify or amend some of the proposals made in the White Paper, the essence of the proposals would, in his opinion be accepted as such. He added that it would be in the interest of the untouchables of the

country to accept them and to agitate for more rights than the ones that had been guaranteed to them in the White Paper.

The arduous physical as well as mental strain which Dr. Ambedkar had undergone in the preceding three or four years took heavy toll of his mental as well as physical health. He was almost on the verge of a nervous breakdown. On the advice of some of his well wishers he went first to Bordi and then to Mahabaleshwar and got himself treated by some eminent *Ayurved Acharyas*. During that period of enforced rest, he had shaven off his hair and put on the robe of a *Sanyasi*. This period of rest, and medical treatment restored Dr. Ambedkar to an almost normal state of health and he returned to Bombay. He was happy to know that the bill sponsoring the draft constitution for the proposed Federation of India was to be placed before the British Parliament very soon, by virtue of which the untouchables of our country would be, for the first time, vested with the right to vote. To that extent his mission had been partially fulfilled and he started feeling restless and took up again his practice as an advocate and also a part time professor in the Government Law College, Bombay in June, 1934. At the same time, with whatever savings he had made, he embarked upon building a house in the Hindu Colony, Dadar, Bombay. As was typical of him, he did not go by the advice of qualified architects. He studied books on architecture and designed and redesigned several times the building plan of his house. His main purpose in building a house was to keep his large collection of books at a single and safe place. The house was at last completed in 1936-37 and named as Rajagriha. The ground floor was designed for domestic needs while the upper storey was made to house the vast collection of books which Dr. Ambedkar had acquired during his various trips abroad.

A Confused Stand on Communal Award by Congress

In June, 1934, the British Government of India lifted the ban on the Congress Party. Congress leaders started revitalising their bases in the districts and provinces immediately. However, to Dr. Ambedkar's utter consternation, the Congress leaders denounced the White paper as well as the communal award which had been endorsed by the British Government in the Joint Committee. An interesting and anomalous feature of the attitude of the Congress Party to the White Paper and the communal award was the effort made by it to appease the Muslim League. The Muslim League was keen to have the communal award

ratified by it and at the same time to discourage Congressmen like Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya from its outright rejection. That was why the Congress leaders, at a meeting of the Working Committee held in Bombay in July, 1934, declared that the Congress Party neither accepted the communal award nor rejected it. This was indeed a baffling moment in the history of our country, when the strongest single party had to take such a confusing stand on an issue that vitally concerned the larger interests of the country. Soon after, the Government of India announced its decision to hold elections to the Central Assembly. Late Shri Gavai, a well known untouchable leader of Vidarbha made an appeal to Gandhiji entreating him to declare publicly his attitude towards the Poona Pact and also requesting him to adopt five depressed class persons as candidates of the Congress Party, without imposing any pre-conditions for contesting the forthcoming elections to the Central Assembly. Gandhiji's reply to Shri Gavai's appeal was rather strange. On one hand, he reaffirmed his belief in the Poona Pact, and on the other rejected the suggestion of Shri Gavai for adopting five representatives of the untouchables to contest the Central Assembly elections on Congress ticket. Dr. Ambedkar with his clarity of thinking endorsed the views of Gandhiji. He requested Gandhiji to help pass a resolution on the communal award at the forthcoming session of the Congress Party without affecting the Poona Pact. He even went to the extent of congratulating Gandhiji on his firm stand and said that people like Shri Gavai who made such a request could not comprehend the intricate issues involved.

The report of the Joint Committee was accepted by the British Parliament which introduced the India Bill on December 19, 1934. When asked to give his opinion on it, Dr. Ambedkar, with his characteristic forthrightness, stated that the depressed classes were opposed not only to the proposed establishment of a Second Chamber (i.e. the Legislative Council) but also to its proposed composition. Dr. Ambedkar's argument was based on the fact that it would defeat the very purpose of the Poona Pact, as the depressed classes candidates had almost no chance of winning elections against the more affluent upper caste Hindu candidates. At the same time, he firmly stated that he was still a party to the Poona Pact. He only wanted it to be implemented in its true spirit and letter. The overwhelming majority of the nationalist press hailed Dr. Ambedkar's *firm* stand in condemning the Joint Committee's Report and the proposed India Bill.

During the intense debates which were being held in the British Parliament on the India Bill, Mr. A.W. Goodman, a Tory M.P. made a forceful appeal against what he considered to be the inadequate representation proposed for the untouchables in the Provincial Assemblies as well as in the Central Assembly. On the other hand, the Congress leaders in India adopted the policy of sitting on the fence apparently with a view to appease the Muslim League, and even allowed Mr. M.A. Jinnah to compel the Central Assembly to endorse the Communal award. Simultaneously, the orthodox Hindus kept up their campaign against the Poona Pact. Although greatly embittered by this betrayal, Dr. Ambedkar maintained that he was still a party to the Poona Pact.

Passing Away of Ambedkar's Wife

At this time, the health of his wife began deteriorating fast and she passed away on May 27, 1935. In fact, because of his pre-occupations, Dr. Ambedkar never had enough time to spare for his family. This pious lady had borne solitude, penury and neglect in silence. Being a deeply religious person, one of her greatest desires was to make a pilgrimage to Pandharpur, a holy place in Maharashtra. However, being an untouchable by birth, she knew that on reaching Pandharpur, she would be asked by the priests to stay away from the temple and offer her prayers from a distance. This was not acceptable to Dr. Ambedkar who consoled her by saying, a sentence in Marathi which is translated into English as follows:— "Forget the Pandharpur which prevents its devotees from praying to the image of God? By our own virtuous way of living, selfless service and sacrifice in the cause of the downtrodden humanity, we would some day create another Pandharpur where we can pray." What a great similarity between this utterance of Dr. Ambedkar and the resolve of Lord Buddha who had vowed to create a new order in which every one in our country would be treated as an equal!

Although an iconoclast and a firm non-believer in the traditional Hindu rituals, Dr. Ambedkar got the last rites of his deceased wife performed in the traditional Hindu manner. He even got his head shaved and put on saffron clothes during the period of mourning. Soon after his wife's death, he had been offered the post of the principal of the Government College of Law, Bombay which he accepted on June 1, 1935. Although in mourning, Dr. Ambedkar with his usual

determination, not only took classes but also looked after the administration of the college.

Decision to Leave the Hindu Fold

Disheartened by the stand taken by the Congress leaders on the Poona Pact, Dr Ambedkar began to debate in his mind as to what further course of action he and his followers should adopt in order to attain their goal. A news item appeared in several of the newspapers that Dr Ambedkar was going to make a declaration of conversion at the Depressed Classes Conference scheduled to be held in October, 1935 at Yeola. This news came as a thunderbolt to the more sensible leaders of the upper caste Hindus. Some of them like Shri N.C. Kelkar and Prof. S M. Mate, sent a joint letter to Dr. Ambedkar promising him a change of heart on the part of the caste Hindus and appealing him not to make the proposed announcement. As stated in an earlier Chapter, Dr. Ambedkar had at one stage publicly announced that he and his followers would not renounce Hinduism the religion of their forefathers. They would only strive to ensure the basic civic rights to the untouchables as equal members of the same religion i.e. the right of temple entry, the right of access to public tanks and wells to draw water for drinking and bathing, and free access to other public institutions like schools, libraries, *dharmshalas* etc. He had signed the Poona Pact after Gandhiji had made a personal appeal to him. However, he had by this time come to the sad conclusion that the caste Hindus were not sincere in the promises they had made to him. Even as late as 1930, when a group of untouchables from a village near Nasik decided to embrace Islam, Dr. Ambedkar persuaded them to wait for some time more and see whether the caste Hindus did what they had promised to them i.e. remove untouchability. Dr. Ambedkar had also been disillusioned by the attitude of the Muslim delegates of third R.T.C.

The Depressed Classes Conference was held at Yeola on October 30, 1935. It was attended by over 10,000 untouchables from many parts of the country, including the then Hyderabad State and the Central Provinces. The Conference was chaired by Shri Rankhambe. In his impassioned speech lasting over an hour and a half, Dr. Ambedkar once again narrated the story of miseries heaped upon them (untouchables) by the caste Hindus in all walks of life, economic, social, educational and political. He pointed out that in spite of these hardships, they had made great sacrifices to secure the minimum of

human rights which were available to their upper caste co-religionists and lamented that the upper caste Hindus were not prepared even to grant or guarantee the untouchables these minimal civil rights and to allow them to live in honour within the folds of Hinduism. He, therefore, expressed the opinion that the time for making a final decision on this issue had now arrived. Since the indignities and humiliations to which the untouchables were subjected to, arose from the fact that they were Hindus by the accident of birth, he posed the question before the delegates of the Conference, whether it would not be better for them to leave the fold of Hinduism and to embrace some other religion which would give them an honourable and equal status. At the same time, he had the wisdom to warn his followers that they had to be very careful in choosing their new faith and not to make a hasty decision. In the course of his speech Dr. Ambedkar declared that the religion was for the man and not the other way around and he uttered those famous words: "I solemnly assure you that I will not die as a Hindu." Concluding his speech, he asked his followers to stop the Kalaram Temple entry *Satyagraha* which they had been waging for the past five years in vain.

Dr. Ambedkar's announcement created a storm not only in different political parties but also shook the social institutions. Offers began to come to Dr. Ambedkar from the top leaders of different religions: Muslims, Christians and Sikhs. The famous Muslim leader of that period, Shri K.L. Gauba, M.L.A., Punjab, sent a telegram to Dr. Ambedkar assuring that the Muslim League would wholeheartedly welcome him and his followers into Islamic brotherhood and would ensure that they were given equal rights with the other Muslims of the country. Bishop Badley of Bombay expressed the view that Dr. Ambedkar's statement was welcome to the Christians because it indicated an ambition on the part of the depressed classes to achieve their rights as human beings and not to be treated almost like beasts. The Secretary of the Mahabodhi Society of Banāras also sent a telegram to Dr. Ambedkar that he and his followers were welcome to embrace Buddhism which was professed by the largest part of Asia and also guaranteed equal status to all converts. As for Sikhs, Sardar Dalip Singh Doabia, Vice-President of the Golden Temple Managing Committee, sent a telegram to Dr. Ambedkar that the Sikh religion, in his view, fulfilled all the requirements regarding the conversion of the depressed classes.

Gandhiji called Dr. Ambedkar's declaration of conversion as an unfortunate one. According to his opinion, untouchability in India was already on its last legs. Gandhiji said that while he could comprehend the anguish of a highly enlightened person like Dr. Ambedkar over the atrocities committed on the untouchables by the caste Hindus, he did not approve of conversion. "Religion", he said "was not like a house or a cloak which one can change at will. It was an integral part of one's own self. I am convinced that a change of faith by him and those who pass the resolution will not serve their cause....as the millions of unsophisticated illiterate Harijans will not listen to him and those who have disowned their ancestral faith; especially when it is remembered that their lives for good or for the evil are inextricably involved with those of caste Hindus." Veer Savarkar, another staunch protagonist of the removal of untouchability, issued an appeal to the untouchables from Ratnagiri, in which district he had been interned by the British Government after his release from Andamans, almost on similar lines. He cautioned the untouchables by warning them that there was no possibility of their receiving a treatment of equality under either Islam or Christianity in India, and specifically pointed out to the strife which was at that period going on between the touchable Christians and the untouchable Christians in the State of Travancore. In fact, Veer Savarkar was, on a careful consideration of facts, more rational in his appeal to the untouchables, because in it he stated in the following words: "Truly speaking, any Ism, in the sense of religion contains something which is not amenable to reason and which is based on belief. Those who hold that the existing religious opinions are not amenable to reason, should not hug irrational beliefs. Dr. Ambedkar, therefore, should embrace a religion which is based on principles that are not averse to logic and reason." The President of the Indian National Congress, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, although condemning the resolution passed by the Depressed Classes Conference on October 19, 1935, appreciated the underlying current of resentment, disillusionment and disenchantment which had made the untouchables pass that resolution. Similar sentiments were expressed even by some untouchable leaders like Shri Deorukhkar and Shri Narayan Kajrolkar.

It goes without saying that Dr. Ambedkar's announcement of conversion on October 30, 1935 shook up the entire country. In a desperate bid, the famous Hindu missionary leader, late Masurkar

Maharaj who was instrumental in reconverting about 10,000 Goan Christians to the Hindu fold appealed to Dr. Ambedkar to withdraw his announcement because the conversion of the untouchables to another faith than Hinduism would spell the doom of the Hindu society itself. Dr. Ambedkar, honest as he was, sadly admitted that he agreed with Masurkar Maharaj and also stated that although he was himself not happy at the idea of conversion, the way to avert the impending tragedy lay only in the hands of the upper caste Hindus. He also told Masurkar Maharaj that the only way out appeared to be that the caste Hindu leaders should honestly make a pledge to exterminate the stigma of untouchability from Hindu society within a prescribed period of time. Masurkar Maharaj although agreed with Dr. Ambedkar pointed out to him the enormous magnitude of the problem and pleaded with him for more patience. Later on, a deputation comprising various Hindu castes, headed by Shri R. G. Pradhan called on Dr. Ambedkar in an effort to assure him of a positive result and to persuade him to withdraw his decision. Dr. Ambedkar's reply was characteristic of him. He said: "Some people think that religion is not essential to society. I do not hold this view. I consider the foundation of religion to be essential to the life and practices of a society. At the root of the Hindu social system lies *dharma* as prescribed in the *Manusmriti*. Such being the case, I do not think it is possible to abolish inequality in Hindu society unless the existing foundation of the *Smriti*—religion is removed and a better one laid in its place. I, however, despair of Hindu society being able to reconstruct itself on better foundation". At the same time, with his usual openmindedness he told the delegation from Nasik that he was prepared to wait for five years and if during this period, the upper caste Hindus could assure him and his followers by positive deeds and not by mere words, of a real change of heart, he was willing to reconsider the entire position.

CHAPTER VIII

AMBEDKAR'S EMERGENCE AS LEADER OF THE UNDERPRIVILEGED

The Government of India Act of 1935 promised provincial Autonomy to the people of British India and announced that elections to the provincial assemblies would be held in 1937. Thus the beginning of the year marked a keen interest and activity among all the political parties as well as leaders, as this would be the first occasion when the people of British India would be able to elect their representatives in the various provinces by adult franchise. After having been disillusioned by the attitude of the upper caste Hindus, during the last few years, specially after witnessing the fate of the Poona Pact, Dr. Ambedkar rallied his friends and lieutenants and founded a new political party called "Independent Labour Party" in August 1936. The party announced a comprehensive programme which aimed at meeting all the immediate needs and voice the grievances of the landless, poor tenants, agriculturists and industrial workers. Its programme also emphasised the need for social reforms in our society as well as a detailed plan for proper village sanitation and housing.

Dr. Ambedkar left for Geneva on November 11, 1936, because he felt he needed some rest and change in order to equip himself better for the forthcoming elections. He spent most of his time in Vienna and Berlin and was in London only for about a week. He returned to Bombay on January 14, 1937. Immediately after his return he started his election campaign, by touring all the districts in Bombay Presidency and explaining to the people the aims and objectives of his party. During the course of his hectic election campaign, he extended the support of his party to some enlightened candidates of other parties like Shri L.B. Bhopatkar, the leader of the Democratic Swaraj Party who

with another enlightened Brahmin, Shri N.C. Kelkar had parted company with the Congress several years ago because of its attitude to the problem of the depressed classes.

In return, Shri Kelkar issued a special appeal to the voters of Bombay to vote for Dr. Ambedkar whom he called the "Uncrowned King of depressed classes" and a person who had attained the highest academic qualifications and a certain measure of fame by hard work, sincerity of purpose and endless struggle.

The Indian National Congress, the biggest party naturally put up its own candidates to contest the elections in all the provinces. However, the two seats to which the Congress Party directed their special attention were the seats being contested by Dr. Ambedkar in Bombay and that by Shri L.B. Bhopatkar in Poona. Shri Palvankar, the well known cricketer of that period was put up by the Congress Party to oppose Dr. Ambedkar while Shri Rajbhoj and Shri Deorukhkar, two well-known untouchables were engaged by the Congress Party to carry on the election campaign against him. The elections finally took place on February 17, 1937 and the results declared a few days later showed that Dr. Ambedkar came out victorious by beating his rival by a large margin of votes. Unfortunately, Shri L.B. Bhopatkar lost, although he had put up a really brave fight against heavy odds. The most remarkable thing was that of the seventeen candidates put up by Dr. Ambedkar as many as fifteen were elected. Another feather in his cap was the verdict delivered by Bombay High Court on March 17, 1937 in which it upheld the decision of the Assistant Judge of Thana regarding the use of water of the Chowdar Tank at Mahad by the untouchables.

Although the Congress Party had won a majority of Hindu seats in these elections, it was apparently not prepared to join the Government. The Governor of the Bombay Presidency, therefore, appointed an interim Ministry, with the stipulation that it was to act only as a caretaker Ministry and the Assembly would be called within a period of six months time. After protracted consultations among themselves, the Congress leaders joined the Assembly on July 19, 1937, the Interim Ministry of the Bombay Presidency having resigned on July 18, 1937. Being in a majority, the Ministry was formed by the Congress Party, with Shri B.G. Kher as its Premier.

Dr. Ambedkar as a Legislator

The first occasion on which Dr. Ambedkar had to cross swords with Shri B.G. Kher was the introduction of a Bill in the third week of August 1937 proposing a salary of Rs. 500/- p.m. for a Minister in addition to house and conveyance allowances. In his criticism of the Bill, he put forth forcefully his argument that four considerations should be kept in mind while discussing or passing the Bill, viz. the prevailing social standards; competence; democracy; and integrity and purity of administration. He went on to argue that if salaries were being fixed in accordance with the prevailing standard of living in the country, the Ministers ought not to draw salaries exceeding Rs. 75/- p.m. as had been proposed earlier. Shri B.G. Kher in his reply stated that the principle underlying the Bill was "Service of the Motherland." He also went on to remind Dr. Ambedkar of his own selfless service to the cause of his community and made an earnest appeal to him to render equally selfless service to the country as well.

During the period when the Provincial Assembly was not in session, Dr. Ambedkar availed himself of the opportunity of continuing his campaign for the upliftment not only of the depressed classes but also of the agricultural labourers who were virtually held in bondage by the owners of the cultivated fields. During his campaign, Dr. Ambedkar addressed several meetings in the Bombay Presidency; and on September 17, 1937 at the Poona Session of the Bombay Assembly, he introduced a Bill to abolish the *Khoti* system of land tenure in the Konkan area of the Presidency. It needs to be emphasised that Dr. Ambedkar was the first in India who introduced a Bill for the abolition of the serfdom of agricultural tenants, which had been perpetuated for the past several centuries.

Another memorable clash which took place between Dr. Ambedkar and the ruling party was on one of the articles of a new Bill aimed at the amendment of the Local Board Act in which the scheduled castes were given the definition of *Harijans* i.e. the People of God. Dr. Ambedkar's dedicated follower in the Legislative Assembly, Shri B.K. (alias Dadasaheb) Gaikwad proposed an amendment seeking that the appellation *Harijan* may be deleted. The speech made by Shri Dadasaheb Gaikwad had been drafted in consultation with Dr. Ambedkar and one of its most stinging portions was as follows: "If the untouchables were the People of God, were the touchables assumed to belong to the Monsters? If all the people were to be called *Harijans*, we should not

object. It is no use only giving the untouchables a sweet name. Something practical should be done to ameliorate their condition'. However, the amendment was thrown out when put to vote, because of the overwhelming majority of Congress members in the Assembly. At this, Dr. Ambedkar rose up from his seat and declared: 'I am very sorry, but I think I cannot help saying that this is a matter on which the wishes of the group i.e. the untouchables ought to have prevailed upon the Government. Nobody would have been hurt and the interests of the country would not have been injured if the amendment of my Honourable friend Mr. Gaikwad had been accepted. In view of the fact that the Government wish to use its majority in a tyrannical manner, I am afraid we must show our disapproval by walking out in a body and not participating further in the day's proceedings'. In a bid to pacify Dr. Ambedkar and his fellow legislators, Shri B.G. Kher stated that the word *Harijan* was polite. He traced its origin to a hymn of the Gujarati saint, Narsi Mehta. In his reply, Dr. Ambedkar stated that though he was not able to suggest any better name for the untouchables, it would have been appropriate if the ruling party had discussed the matter with the untouchable legislators before moving this amendment. He also added that Shri Kher's arguments were not convincing and he staged a walk out from the Assembly followed by his fellow legislators belonging to the depressed classes.

As a Champion of the Working Class

Although continuing to champion the cause of the untouchables, Dr. Ambedkar did not forget to fight for the rights of the workers, whose interests were of a major concern to the Party founded by him viz. the Independent Labour Party. In September, 1938, the Bombay Legislative Assembly took up for consideration the Industrial Disputes Bill. Both Dr. Ambedkar and Shri Jamna Das Mehta opposed the Bill firmly. Dr. Ambedkar in his forthright manner, described the Bill as retrograde and capitalistic favouring the industrialists at the cost of workers. This led to a bitter war of words between Dr. Ambedkar and Shri K.M. Munshi, the Home Minister in Shri B.G. Kher's Ministry. However, being in a majority, the Congress Party passed the Bill. Soon afterwards, a programme of action was chalked out by the Independent Labour Party and the Bombay Presidency Trade Union Congress and a one-day strike was declared on 7th November, 1938 and a call was



First meeting of the National Defence Council at Simla in 1941. The Viceroy shaking hands with Shri Jamnadas Mehta. Dr. Ambedkar 3rd from the Right.

given to all the mill workers of Bombay to participate in the strike. A labour rally was held at the Kāmgar Maidan in the evening of November 6, 1938 which was attended by at least 80,000 labourers and was presided over by Shri Jamna Das Mehta who made a bitter attack on the Congress Ministry for passing such an Act. Shri Indulal Yagnik and Shri S.A. Dange also made equally bitter attacks on the Congress Party. On the morning of November 7, 1938, a strong posse of police took up positions at different strategic points at 5.30 a.m. The Home Minister, Shri K.M. Munshi, personally supervised the arrangements. The strike was totally peaceful and one of its major features was a tour of the mill areas by Dr. Ambedkar and Shri Jamna Das Mehta in a lorry from which they exhorted the mill workers to make the strike a success but in a purely non-violent manner. The strike was a success although it was marred by a few unpleasant incidents. At one place some anti-social elements resorted to stone throwing because of which some people were injured, including one police officer and some constables

and the police had to open fire to disperse the crowd, in which two persons were injured. Also, the car in which Shri K.M. Munshi, the Home Minister of Bombay, was travelling was stoned. But for these isolated incidents of violence, the strike was totally peaceful. The same evening another massive meeting of the workers was held at the Kamgar Maidan, Bombay under the presidentship of Shri Jamna Das Mehta, who congratulated the workers for having staged a successful and peaceful strike and strongly denounced the Government and the mill owners. In his speech, Dr. Ambedkar stated that he was even now prepared to join the Congress if it made a sincere promise to fight against British Imperialism. This strike established Dr. Ambedkar not only as a leader of the depressed classes but also a successful leader of the working class.

Educate, Organise and Agitate

Dr. Ambedkar now became an unquestioned leader of the weaker sections of the society. His qualities as a leader of the downtrodden were clearly expressed in his speech at Nagpur on 20th July, 1942 where he said: "You have less need of an assurance from me that I will fight for the ideal. I stand in greater need of an assurance from you. You have assured me of your love and affection. It was quite unnecessary. I want an assurance of another kind. It is an assurance of strength, unity and determination to stand for our rights, fight for our rights and never to turn back until we win our rights. You promise to do your part. I promise to do mine. With justice on our side I do not see how we can lose our battle. It is a matter of joy to fight this battle. The battle is in the fullest sense spiritual. There is nothing material or sordid in it. For our struggle is for our freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of human personality which has been suppressed and mutilated by the Hindu social system and will continue to be suppressed and mutilated if in the political struggle, the Hindus win and we lose. My final words of advice to you are "Educate, Organise and Agitate", have faith in yourselves and never lose hope. I shall always be with you as I know you will be with me."

CHAPTER IX

SCALING NEW HEIGHTS

The outbreak of World War II on September 3, 1939, found the Congress Party on the horns of a dilemma. The Congress ministries resigned in the first week of November 1939, on the orders of the Congress High Command and on August 9, 1942, the Congress Party launched its Quit India Movement. This movement had been launched after the failure of the mission led by Sir Stafford Cripps, which held detailed discussions with almost all the major political parties in the country. Not only Gandhiji and M.A. Jinnah, but also Dr. Ambedkar rejected the proposals put forth by Sir Stafford Cripps, although each one did so on different grounds. As far as Dr. Ambedkar was concerned, his rejection of the Cripps proposals was mainly on the ground that the British Government was apparently not prepared to grant the depressed classes their due place in the proposed Dominion of India while at the same time agreeing to a special status for the Indian Muslims.

The 50th birthday of Dr. Ambedkar was celebrated on April 14, 1942 and a big public meeting was held at Poona at which glowing tributes were paid to the honesty, sincerity of purpose, intellect and devotion of Dr. Ambedkar to the cause of the oppressed by not only the Untouchables but also by many enlightened upper caste Hindu leaders. However, the main function to celebrate Dr. Ambedkar's birthday was held at *Chowpati* in Bombay on April 19, 1940, which was presided over by Dr. M.R. Jayakar.

On this Occassion, Dr. Jayakar said that he had known Dr. Ambedkar for many years. He realised how a learned man from a depressed class had been able to raise a community as a whole which had been oppressed by Hindus for thousands of years. Dr. Ambedkar studied the circumstances, history and religion, and came to

conclusion that the efforts of the so-called saints of those days who tried to efface the untouchability had failed. He, therefore, made a vigorous programme to fight with the upper caste Hindus and demand justice for the untouchables. Setting aside the religious movements he laid greater stress upon the political and economic state of his community. Apart from his services to his own community, he proved himself to be a true patriot of this land.

Mr. M.R.A. Baig, Sheriff of Bombay, described Dr. Ambedkar as a great leader. The famous labour leader, Shri N.N. Joshi, addressing the meeting said that he felt proud as his old student whom he had taught in Standard IV had attained such eminence. Similar sentiments were expressed by almost all leading newspapers.

Ambedkar Joins Viceroy's Executive Council

In the third week of June, 1942, it was widely rumoured that the Viceroy and Governor General of India was thinking of expanding his Executive Council and that Dr. Ambedkar's name had been included in the list of the new Members. The news was confirmed when the names of Sri C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, Sir Mohd. Usman, Dr. Ambedkar, Sir J.P. Srivastava and Sir Joginder Singh were announced as the additional new Members to be inducted into the Executive Council. Dr. Ambedkar's inclusion in the Executive Council was widely welcomed. Even the Congress papers stated that it might prove to be good for the labour class of the country. *The Times of India*, Bombay, appropriately pointed out that this was the first time in the history of the country that an untouchable Hindu had been appointed as a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council.

Soon after this announcement, Dr. Ambedkar left for Nagpur, the then capital of the Central Provinces and Berar to address the All-India Depressed Classes Conference, which was to be held there on July 18 and 19, 1942. While in Nagpur, a special messenger of the Viceroy came to the town requesting Dr. Ambedkar to take over charge of the Labour Portfolio in the Executive Council, which he did telegraphically on the morning of July 20, 1942. On his return to Bombay Dr. Ambedkar made hurried preparation for leaving for New Delhi on July 27, 1942. His acceptance of the Labour Portfolio in the Viceroy's expanded Executive Council was naturally bitterly criticised by the Congress Party. However, at a reception held in his honour by the Depressed Classes Welfare Association on August 23, 1943 in New

Delhi, Dr. Ambedkar announced that high office held no charm for him and that he would be the first to quit and go back to Bombay if he found that his efforts as the Labour Member were unsuccessful in improving the conditions of the workers and toilers of the country.

In September 1942, in an important discussion in the Central Assembly on the political situation in India after the declaration of the Quit India Movement in August 1942, Dr. Ambedkar stated in categorical terms that in the Quit India Movement the Congress Party headed by Gandhiji appeared to him to have given up in a large measure its cherished aim of non-violence. At the same time, he was equally scathing in his criticism of the power of veto which was vested in Secretary of State for India and put forth his view that the final authority should vest in the legislators of the country. He also delivered a profound speech entitled "Indian Labour and War" on November 13, 1942 from the Bombay Station of the All India Radio in which he forcefully argued that the war against Nazism was not merely a war being waged with territorial ambitions by two great powers but a war out of which a new social order would hopefully emerge. He explained in unambiguous terms that the victory of Nazism would spell the doom of values like equality, fraternity and liberty. It is to be borne in mind that at this time Hitler's armies were engaged in a fierce battle to capture the USSR, which had been the hope of the have-nots all over the world ever since its emergence as an independent socialist country in 1918.

The Quit India Movement, petered out after a few months of mass upheaval throughout the country; and Gandhiji started his 21 day fast on February 10, 1943 at the Agha Khan Palace. The whole country was shocked by this news and pressures were brought to bear on the Indian Members of the Executive Council to resign. As a result, Sir Homi Modi and Sir N N. Sarkar tendered their resignations. However, Dr. Ambedkar did not follow suit because he had publicly disagreed with Gandhiji and the Congress Party on the issue and also because he felt that his continuance as the Labour Member in Executive Council of the Viceroy might help the cause of the labour classes. The Standing Labour Committee had already been set up and its third meeting was held at the Bombay Government Secretariat on May 7, 1943 under his presidentship. At this meeting one important proposal for consideration was the establishment of Joint Labour Management Committee at least in factories and industrial units engaged in work

concerning the war efforts, on the lines of similar committee already established in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. The second question to be taken up by the Labour Standing Committee was the establishment of employment exchanges. The second session of the tripartite Labour Conference under the presidentship of Dr. Ambedkar was held at New Delhi on 6th and 7th September, 1943, at which he delivered a forceful appeal putting forth the long overdue and long neglected demands of the workers for food, clothing, shelter, education, cultural amenities and basic health facilities. As a result, a resolution to establish a machinery to go into the question of equitable wages and earnings and for drawing up a policy of social security for labour was unanimously adopted. In April 1944, Dr. Ambedkar moved a Bill proposing paid holidays for industrial workers employed in factories or industrial establishments which functioned all the year around.

Soon afterwards, Gandhiji was released on reasons of health from the Aga Khan Palace, from where and he proceeded to Panchagani to recoup his health. An announcement was made from Panchagani by Shri C. Rajagopalachari that Gandhiji had made a new offer to Mr. M.A. Jinnah through him. But he did not disclose its details. Many Indian leaders, including Veer Savarkar described this secret offer as an act of treachery. However, being more a man of logic than emotion, Dr. Ambedkar welcomed Gandhiji's offer to Mr. Jinnah but at the same time stated that it would have been more appropriate if the offer had been made directly by Gandhiji himself. He went on to say that he failed to understand why his offer of plebiscite had been turned down by Mr. Jinnah. However, the details of the offer soon became public after the cryptic announcement by Shri C. Rajagopalachari, and Dr. Ambedkar got the opportunity to express his frank opinion on it. Dr. Ambedkar sent a letter to Gandhiji stating that in addition to the settlement of the Hindus-Muslim problem, the settlement of the problem of the Hindu-Untouchables was equally necessary if the goal of the just solution to the Indian problem was to be achieved. In his reply dated August 6, 1944, Gandhiji replied that although he was fully aware of Dr. Ambedkar's abilities and would love to have him as his colleague and a co-worker he did not agree with him. To him the question of the depressed classes was of a religious and social nature and it had to be sorted out within the confines of Hindu society. This only proved that Gandhiji and Dr. Ambedkar held different views on this issue.

Search for a Solution of the Indian Problem

After the failure of the Cripps Mission, hectic efforts were being made by different leaders and parties to resolve the stalemate. In fact, a pact had been made between Shri Bhoolabhai Desai on behalf of the Congress Party and Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan on behalf of the Muslim League, as a result of which the two parties had agreed to have some kind of parity. Lord Wavell, the then Viceroy of India, left for London in March 1945 to discuss this pact. At that time Dr. Ambedkar was also thinking on the shape of tomorrow's India. He unfolded his vision on May 6, 1945 during his address to the annual session of the Scheduled Castes Federation. He stated that majority rule in India appeared to be impracticable in theory as well as in practice. That was why he proposed that weightages be given to the minority communities in the legislatures and advised the caste Hindus to be satisfied with a small majority only. Since, his plan envisaged a united India, he appealed to the Indian Muslims to accept his plan because it offered them greater security and also provided relief from the fear of Hindu domination which haunted them. The most important feature of the plan was that the depressed classes were to hold the balance of power between the Hindus and the Muslims.

Dr. Ambedkar's plan evoked, understandably, strong criticism from several quarters including the Congress Party. In the first week of June 1945, Lord Wavell returned to India with the so-called Wavell Plan which was a hotchpotch of the various plans put forth by different political leaders and parties of the country. The British Government released the Congress leaders from jails all over the country and announced the holding of a Conference at Simla in the last week of June, 1945. Dr. Ambedkar being a Member of the Executive Council did not take part in the Simla Conference, which, however ended in a stalemate on the question of the composition of the Interim Ministry. The Congress insisted on having its own Muslim nominees in it, while Mr. Jinnah was equally adamant that the Muslim members of the proposed Interim Government of India should be Muslim Leaguers only. The world political scene also underwent a sea change in July, 1945. The Conservative Government in Britain was voted out of power and a Labour Government took its place. Japan also surrendered unconditionally after the dropping of atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the Americans. Hitler's defences also were fast crumbling and he was caught between the advancing forces of the Americans and

the British on the western front and those of Stalin on the eastern front.

The Viceroy, Lord Wavell, made another journey to England in the second half of August 1945 to consult the new British Government and on his return to India in the middle of September 1945 announced that General Elections would soon be held in the country. All the major political parties started their preparations for the forthcoming elections. The Congress Party entered the election campaign with its "Quit India" slogan, the Muslim League with its "Pakistan or Perish" slogan and the Hindu Mahasabha with its slogan of "Independence and Integrity of India". Dr. Ambedkar's Scheduled Castes Federation suffered from a major handicap. It has neither organized electioneering machinery nor funds. However, undeterred by these facts, Dr. Ambedkar opened his party's campaign on October 4, 1945 at a meeting in Poona at which he emphasised that the depressed classes felt let down by the Congress because it was indifferent to their disabilities and was unable to remove them. He, therefore, exhorted the depressed classes to capture political power on their own. He addressed several meetings at Ahmedabad, Manmad, Akola, Nagpur and Madras. While doing so, he did not neglect his work as Labour Member in the Viceroy's Executive Council. He inaugurated the 7th Indian National Labour Conference at New Delhi on November 27, 1945 and the Conference of the Regional Labour Commissioners at the Bombay Secretariat in the first week of December, 1945.

On March 15, the new British Labour Government finally acknowledged the right of India to become independent within or outside the British Commonwealth. A delegation headed by Sir Stafford Cripps reached New Delhi on March 24, 1946 and held discussions with leaders like Gandhiji, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Mr. M.A. Jinnah, Dr. S.P. Mookerjee and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad as well as the Nawab of Bhopal State who represented the Indian Princes. On April 5, 1946 the British delegation also met Dr. Ambedkar and Master Tara Singh. In the course of his discussions with the British delegation, Dr. Ambedkar placed a memorandum before it in which he proposed some safeguards for the Scheduled Castes for inclusion in the new constitution of the country. The Mission gave its verdict in the form of a State Paper which proposed a Federation of India along with the formation of a Constituent Assembly and an Interim Government at the Centre. The State Paper did not make any

mention of the demands of the Scheduled Castes. After the release of the State Paper, the Viceroy dissolved his Executive Council and Dr. Ambedkar came back to Bombay in the last week of May, 1946.

CHAPTER X

AN EMINENT EDUCATIONIST

On return to Bombay, Dr. Babasahib Ambedkar got busy in the educational activities. He started Siddharth College on June 20, 1946 under the auspices of the People's Education Society founded by him on July 8, 1945. The main aim of the People's Education Society was the advancement of the educational interests of the lower middle classes, specially those belonging to the Scheduled Castes. However, while appointing the teaching staff for these newly founded institutions, Dr. Ambedkar's sole criterion was merit, and not caste, with the result that several positions in these institutions were, and still continue to be, manned by really competent persons belonging to the upper castes. Thus, the first institution founded by Dr. Babasahib Ambedkar was the Siddharth College, Bombay. Siddhartha was one of the Buddha's many synonyms. Dr. Ambedkar wanted that teachers and students in this institution should follow Buddha's teachings. According to him, "Buddha stood for social freedom, intellectual freedom, economic freedom and political freedom. He taught equality, equality not between man and man only but between man and woman. Buddha's teachings cover almost every aspect of the social life of the people, his doctrines are modern and his main concern was to ensure salvation to man during his life on earth and not after his death."

The second institution founded by the People's Education Society was the Milind College at Aurangabad. Its foundation stone was laid by Dr. Rajendra Prasad in September 1951. This institution was named after the Greek King Minander (in Buddhist literature known as Milind) who ruled the North-Western Province of India. According to Dr. Babasahib Ambedkar Milind had gained great fame as a great scholar. Attracted by the teachings of the Buddha, he invited the Bhikkhus,



Dr. Rajendra Prasad laying the foundation stone of Milind College, Aurangabad (Maharashtra). Dr. Babasahib Ambedkar, founder chairman of the People's Education Society, standing by his side.

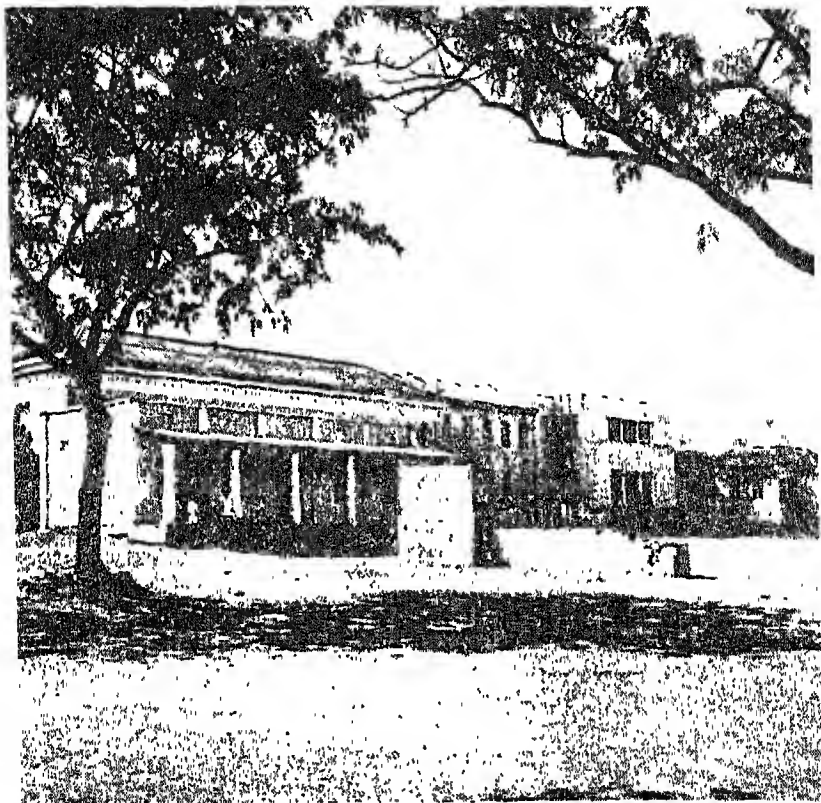
and the scholars of Buddhism to his court, but nobody was prepared to cross swords with him. He instructed his courtiers to bring any Bhikkhu who preached the Dhamma. The Bhikkhus approached Nagasen, a learned and a versatile Bhikkhu and requested him to discuss the religion of Buddha with the King. The discussions between the King Minander and Bhikkhu Nagasen had been collected, and preserved in the form of a book known by the name of "Milind Panha". Dr. Babasahib Ambedkar wanted the teachers and students of the college to follow the example of Minander who was famous for his intellectual integrity.

Both these institutions have grown in strength and stature over the years. The People's Education Society later on started many more such institutions at various places in Maharashtra.

Dr. Babasahib Ambedkar used to visit these institutions quite often, and address the staff and students. His addresses were full of information and used to narrate his own experience as a student. He often said that a person remained a student throughout his life. He advised every person to read, maintain his personal library and be helpful to the needy people in the society around him. There were times when he could be seen standing in the sun supervising the construction work of the building and giving instructions on all sorts of technical matters. During his visits, he always stayed in a small room of the college building instead of going to a hotel. His opinion was "why spend money unnecessarily? Ours is a society meant for poor people. I am fully satisfied with this arrangement. What I need is just *Bhaji Bhakar* (vegetable and a bread).

An incident of this period of Dr. Ambedkar's life is worth narrating. It so happened that some friends went to Aurangabad Hotel, and saw by chance the famous actor Dilip Kumar and his sisters who had come to spend some time and visit world famous Ajanta and Ellora Caves and see the frescoes. They thought of taking him to Dr. Babasahib Ambedkar with the intention that he may donate some money to the institution. To their surprise, Babasahib got very much annoyed and told them in very angry tone, "I do not want donations from actors, industrialists or businessmen, nor would I name my institutions after such persons. That is why I have named these after Siddharth and Milind. Staff and students should learn from such great religious preachers and visionaries who are known for their values, moral calibre and intellectual integrity. I am always ready to make sacrifices for great

values and ideals." Afterwards they went to Dilip Kumar to know his reaction. His comments were: "Dr. Babasahib Ambedkar is like my father. I fully appreciate his views."



Milind College at Aurangabad (Maharashtra) founded by Dr Ambedkar

It would not be out of place to mention in brief the work done by members of the Governing Body who assisted Babasahib in this task. Late Rai Sahib G.T. Meshram performed an important role in the construction of the college building. Although not a qualified engineer, his knowledge in this area was superb, and he used to work for eighteen hours a day. Due to exertion, he had a heart attack, and died in harness. Later on, late Karmaveer Dadasahib Gaikwad

completed this task. In this task, Shri R.R. Pawar, an employee of Indian Railways, was of great help to Babasahib. Shri Pawar was very active in all the struggles launched by Dr. Babasahib Ambedkar and had done an excellent work as member of the College Committee of Milind College. Not only Shri Pawar but his whole family was deeply involved in Babasahib's mission. Other members of the society have done good work and kept these institutions going. Late Professor V.G. Rao was remembered by every one even today. He was popularly known as "Very Good" Rao among the members of the Society, staff and students. He was very kind hearted, generous and noble person and used to take a lot of interest in the Society's activities. Late Shri D.G. Jadhav was an able administrator, and had complete grasp of the work done by the Society. Justice R.R. Bhole, with a judicious approach and rich experience in the field of education did a marvellous job in the expansion of the Society's institutions. The others like late Rao Bahadur S.K. Bole, late Rao Bahadur N. Shivraj, late Shri Hirji Bhai Patel, late Principal M V. Donde, late Shri B.H. Varale, late Nana Surba Tipnis, late Shri Parmar Guruji, late Shri Mohite Guruji and so many others also contributed a lot to the Society's expansion programmes. Shri K.B. Talwatkar did a nice job in coordinating all these activities and implementing them as member secretary of the Society.

Late Runjaji Bharsakhle, custodian of the Milind College, was a very dedicated servant of the institution. Although he had no formal education, his presence was felt in all the difficult situations in the Campus. The staff of the college was of high calibre, and the institution provided many opportunities to the students in the form of curricular activities. Prof. (Dr.) Gangadhar Pantaswne, a well known literary figure of Maharashtra used to stage Marathi plays extremely well during social gathering of the college. Late Prof. N.P. Sharma did a great job in the fields of sports and N.C.C. activities. He was humane, kind and lovable person and was immensely liked by the students. During his tenure, the college won in almost all the games like cricket, football, hockey table tennis etc. in the Inter-collegiate tournaments of the university. He organised N.C.C. camps very efficiently and earned praise from his superiors. The secret of his popularity among the students was his involvement with the students. He used to play with them, train them, understand their social and economic background, dine with them and even dance with them. Mention should also be made about the late Dr. N.R. Tawde, the then

Vice-Chancellor of Marathwada University for the advice rendered by him to improve the institution.

First Generation Students

It would be interesting to throw light on the conditions under which the students of these institutions, mostly first generation learners and belonging to Scheduled Castes studied. This community had no tradition whatsoever of learning even at the school level. Utter poverty and social handicaps were the two main hurdles in the way of their education. One can therefore imagine how difficult it was for them to pursue their education. Most of them received scholarships although not sufficient for board and lodging and they had to manage with hardly one meal a day. They did not have enough text books. The question of purchasing reference books did not arise at all. They had to depend on class notes and meagre library facilities. A number of students appeared for their university examinations on empty stomachs. This was the fate of these students. Nevertheless, they had strong will, determination and courage to complete their higher education. This was one part of the story. The other part began after the completion of their education. It was extremely difficult for them to get employment in accordance with their qualifications and training. Again they had to starve. On getting employment, other problems began. The whole family (parents, brothers, sisters and relatives) looked at him for financial help, when he himself was not able to make his both ends meet, within the salary. He was fully occupied with this situation throughout his service. There were thousands of such families who were caught in such situations. The people and quite often the press of this country did not realise the socio-economic conditions of these people and the various problems they had to face. They gave the impression that these students received scholarships, had reservations in the services and enjoyed life at the cost of other communities. It was time the people start thinking in a more practical and rational way, and help these people in whatever capacity they can. This would be a great national service.

The contribution of any institution was judged by its results. The students of these institutions, studying under such adverse conditions were occupying very high positions in all walks of life today. They were spread all over the country and have made their mark as doctors, engineers, scientists, administrators, educationists, principals,

professors etc. One of the students was occupying a very high position in the Institute of Social and Economic Change, Bangalore, after acquiring three Ph. D's. One of the students was a judge of the Bombay High Court, while another was the Advocate General of Maharashtra. Hundreds of examples of this type could be cited. Most of these students were first generation learners. But for these colleges they would not have dreamt of higher education. Babasaheb Ambedkar rendered yeoman service in this crucial area of education and character building.

CHAPTER XI

MAKING OF THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION

On August 24, 1946, the names of the members of the Interim Ministry were announced. The list included Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Sri C. Rajagopalachari, Shri Sarat Chandra Bose and Shri Jagjivan Ram. As the Muslim League did not cooperate with the Viceroy in the formation of the Interim Ministry in the initial stages, the Muslim posts were given by the Government of India to other Muslim leaders. On that particular day, Dr. Ambedkar was attending the Working Committee of the Scheduled Castes Federation in Poona. He and his colleagues were greatly disappointed at the inadequate representation given to the Scheduled Castes in the Interim Ministry. In a final bid to ensure adequate representation for the Scheduled Castes in the new Government of India, he left for England on October, 15, 1946. Muslim League joined the Interim Government while he was away. On reaching England, Dr. Ambedkar had detailed discussions with the British Prime Minister Attlee as well as the Secretary of State for India. He also met Winston Churchill and several others. However, it soon became apparent to him that neither the British Government nor any of the major British political parties was prepared to listen to his demands. So, he returned to Bombay in November, 1946.

The Constituent Assembly opened on December 9, 1946. It was boycotted by the Muslim League. Dr. Rajendra Prasad was elected its President and a committee for framing its rules and procedures was appointed. On December 13, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru delivered a superb speech while moving the resolution on the objectives of the constitution. He declared that India's objective was to be an independent, sovereign, democratic republic. On December 15, 1946,

Sir M.R. Jayakar, a well known legal expert, sought the postponement of the passing of the resolution moved by Pandit Nehru till such time as the Muslim League and the Indian States joined the Constituent Assembly. There was an uproar on this suggestion made by Sir M.R. Jayakar. At this point, the President of the Constituent Assembly requested Dr. Ambedkar to express his views on this controversial issue. Rising in his seat, Dr. Ambedkar calmly surveyed the Assembly and found himself in the midst of some of the greatest Indians of that era. In a closely-reasoned speech, he stated as follows: "I know, today we are divided politically, socially and economically. We are in warring camps and I am probably one of the leaders of a warring camp. But with all this, I am convinced that, given time and circumstances, nothing in the world will prevent this country from becoming one, and with all our castes and creeds I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that we shall in the future be a united people. I have no hesitation in saying that, notwithstanding the agitation of the League for the partition of India, some day enough light will dawn upon the Muslims themselves, and they, too will begin to think that a united India is better for everybody". Criticising the Congress Party for having given up its earlier stand for a strong Centre, he said: "The question I am asking is, is it prudent for you to do it? Is it wise to do it? Power is one thing and wisdom and prudence quite a different thing. In deciding the destinies of the people, the dignities of the leaders or men or parties ought to count for nothing...Let us prove by our conduct that we have not only the power but also the wisdom to carry with us all sections of the country and to make them march on that road which is bound to lead us to unity". This speech of Dr. Ambedkar had a strange effect on even the Congress members who had earlier opposed Sir M.R. Jayakar's move for postponement. They applauded his speech spontaneously and agreed to the postponement of consideration to another session of the Constituent Assembly to be held in January, 1947. Soon afterwards, Dr. Ambedkar returned to Bombay to take care of the interests of the People's Education Society. He found the atmosphere in Bombay hostile. Some so-called Congressmen had stabbed to death Shri Deorukhkar, a well known Scheduled Caste leader of Bombay early in January, 1947 and Dr. Ambedkar's house was surrounded by some hooligans. The British Government soon after announced its decision to hand over by June 1947 the full powers of the Government of India to either some form of a Central Government for British-India or to the existing Provincial

Governments, if the former course was not possible. Dr. Ambedkar had prepared in March, 1947, an exhaustive memorandum in which he had, *inter alia*, proposed that the Scheduled Castes should have a separate electorate only in those constituencies in which seats were specifically reserved for them while in others they were to cast their votes jointly.

Hindu-Muslim Riots and Partition of India

In the meantime, extensive Hindu-Muslim riots took place in many parts of the country, specially in Punjab and Bengal and the Congress leaders were ultimately forced to ask for a partition of those two provinces on communal basis. Dr. Ambedkar attended the third session of the Constituent Assembly which was held in April, 1947 and at which the Reports of the Advisory Committee and the Fundamental Rights Committee were adopted. It was during this session, that the Constituent Assembly passed on April 29, 1947, the famous resolution abolishing completely untouchability in any form. This particular resolution was moved by Sardar Patel.

Since Lord Wavell was not very successful in handling the turbulent Indian situation, he was replaced by Lord Louis Mountbatten. After holding consultations with the British Government, Mountbatten came back to India and declared the famous Mountbatten Plan on June 3, 1947, in which the partition of the country into India (*or Bharat*), and Pakistan was proposed. The princely States were left free to choose and join either of the two new countries. The circumstances were such that even Gandhiji who had all along opposed partition of the country on communal basis had to accept it, although he did so with a very heavy heart.

The Act of Indian Independence was passed by the British Parliament and the Constituent Assembly became, in effect, the first Parliament of the country, although a divided one. Since Dr. Ambedkar had been originally elected to the Constituent Assembly by the Bengal Provincial Legislative Assembly and because Bengal had undergone partition on Hindu-Muslim basis, he had to get re-elected to the Constituent Assembly from the Bombay Legislative Assembly to fill in the vacancy caused by the resignation of Dr. M.R. Jayakar.

In the fourth week of July, 1947, the names of the Members of the first Cabinet of independent India were to be announced. After consulting Sardar Patel and Shri S.K. Patil, Shri Jawaharlal Nehru met



Dr. Babasahib Ambedkar, taking oath as Minister for Law.

Dr. Ambedkar in his room and asked him whether he was willing to join the Cabinet as Minister for Law. On Dr. Ambedkar's agreeing, Pandit Nehru went to Mahatma Gandhi at the *Bhangi* Colony, New Delhi, where the latter was staying, to get his approval of the final list of names. Pandit Nehru had also the magnanimity and vision to include Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, the well known Hindu Mahasabha leader, in the Cabinet. It goes to the credit of both Pandit Nehru on the one hand and people like Dr. Ambedkar and Dr. S.P. Mookerjee on the other, that at this critical juncture of Indian history, they were ready to sink their differences and agreed to work together in the cause of the newly-born independent India. Our country became independent on August 15, 1947, although large parts of the former united India were still engulfed in communal riots. On August 29, 1947, the Constituent Assembly announced the names of the Committee for drafting the Constitution of free India. It was headed by Dr. Ambedkar as its Chairman and included such persons of eminence as Sir Alladi Krishnaswamy, Sir B. N. Rau, Shri Syed M. Saadullah, Sir N. Gopalaswami Iyengar, Dr. K.M. Munshi, Sir B.L. Mitter and Shri D.P. Khaitan. Subsequently, the Drafting Committee

was reconstituted when Shri N. Madhava Rao was appointed to replace Sir B L. Mitter and Sri T.T. Krishnamachari to fill in the vacancy caused by the death of Shri D.P. Khaitan.

The partition of the country and the unprecedented movement of millions of people from India to Pakistan and *vice-versa* as well as the inability of the Pakistan Government to provide safety even to the Scheduled Caste Pakistanis, whom the Muslims were earlier offering all sorts of allurements to embrace Islam, deeply hurt Dr Ambedkar. He issued a statement strongly denouncing the Pakistan Government. He bitterly complained that the Scheduled Caste Hindus were not being allowed to come over to India and were being forcibly converted to Islam and this was also happening in the Hyderabad State. He bluntly told the Scheduled Caste Hindus stranded in Pakistan or in Hyderabad State to come over to India by any means since they could no longer consider the Muslims to be their friends. He also asked them not to embrace Islam at any cost. He finally made an appeal to the Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru, to take urgent steps for evacuating the Scheduled Caste Hindus from Pakistan to India.

Shaping New Constitution of India

Dr. Ambedkar was now fully immersed in the task of drafting the Constitution of India, with characteristic single-mindedness of purpose in spite of deterioration in his health. A speech delivered by Shri T.T. Krishnamachari on November 5, 1948 in the Constituent Assembly shows that Dr. Ambedkar was in fact the chief architect of our democratic constitution. In his speech, Shri Krishnamachari drew the attention of the Assembly to the fact that out of the seven members nominated by the Constituent Assembly to the Drafting Committee, one died and was not replaced, one was away in America for most of the time and his place was not filled up by another person, and another member was more engrossed in the affairs of the State, and also that one or two others were mostly away from Delhi because of health reasons. Shri Krishnamachari candidly stated: "Ultimately the burden of drafting the constitution fell on Dr. Ambedkar and I have no doubt that we are grateful to him for having achieved this task in a manner which is undoubtedly commendable."

The draft Constitution was completed at the end of February 1948. The draft Constitution which was finally accepted and passed by the Constituent Assembly has several unique features. Firstly, it is one of

the very few written Constitutions in the whole world. Secondly, it is not only very comprehensive but also most carefully worded. Thirdly, it combines the requisite degree of flexibility as well as rigidity. Finally, it has built-in-provisions for making such amendments which might become necessary with the passage of time. Till today, the Constitution of India, drafted by Dr. Ambedkar, has stood the test of time.

After having completed his task of drafting the Constitution for independent India, Dr. Ambedkar was completely exhausted and came back to Bombay in order to recuperate his health. Because of his indifferent health, he married Dr. (Miss) Savita Kabir. The marriage was solemnized on the 2nd day of his 56th birthday at New Delhi, under the Civil Marriages Act by the Deputy Commissioner of Delhi in the presence of only a few personal friends.



Dr. Ambedkar as the Minister of Law (1949). He is seen here with the Hon'ble Begum Rasul and Shri S.N. Mookerjee, Joint Secretary, Constituent Assembly

The draft Constitution underwent three readings by the Constituent Assembly. On November 25, 1949, Dr. Ambedkar, its principal architect, arose to reply to the debate which followed the third reading. He delivered a 40-minute speech in which he made in an impassioned appeal to the people of independent India to defend their freedom with the last drop of their blood. He also cautioned against hero worship and at the end of his speech he made a fervent appeal to all Indians to be a nation in the true social and psychological term by totally discarding the caste system. The entire Constituent Assembly, including Prime Minister Nehru, listened to his speech with rapt attention and he was applauded by all the Members when he sat down.

Dr. Ambedkar warned the Indian people about the contradictions in the Constitution and in their social and economic life. He said: "On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics, we shall have equality, and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics, we will be recognising the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In social and economic life, we shall by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will only put our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up."

The draft Constitution was finally adopted by the Constituent Assembly on November 26, 1949. The Constitution of India originally contained 395 Articles and 8 Schedules. The draft Constitution was scrutinised very thoroughly by the members of the Constituent Assembly. The debates reveal that Dr. Babasahib Ambedkar, the chief architect of the draft Constitution, was very closely questioned, but he was ready to answer all questions of the members. After discussion on each Article and the amendments suggested thereto, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the President of the Assembly would turn to the enlightened and distinguished Chairman (Dr. Ambedkar) and say, "Would you like to comment? Would you like to throw light on this issue? Dr. Ambedkar will now reply." Then the whole House would listen to his reply which was based on logic, facts, statistics etc, with rapt attention.

Ali members were happy to see the maker of the Constitution explaining all the points. Thus Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had a final word in all the matters pertaining to the Constitution during the debate.

Dr. Ambedkar's authority in law, social and economic conditions of our country, history, anthropology, constitutions of the world, jurisprudence etc. was of immense help. All members expressed their appreciation of the excellent and monumental work done by him and showered praise on him for successfully framing the Constitution of free and independent India. Many members and the press all over the country hailed him as '*Modern Manu*' (Law-giver). Some of the tributes paid to him were worth reading.

Dr. P. Sitaramayya: "Dr. Ambedkar has gone away, else I would have liked to tell him what steam-roller intellect he brought to bear upon this magnificent and tremendous task; irresistible, indomitable, unconquerable and levelling down plains and short poppies. Whatever he felt right, he stood by it, regardless of consequences." Shri Frank Anthony: "I would like very briefly to pay a broad tribute to my Hon. Friend, Dr. Ambedkar. I do not believe that any one of us can really gauge the volume of work and the intensity of concentration that must have been put in the production of the voluminous and by no means an easy document. And while on occasions I may not have agreed with him, it always gives me the greatest pleasure to listen to his tremendous grasp not only of fundamentals, but also of details, of the clarity with which he invariably presented his case."

Shri Tajamal Hussain: "The credit for framing the Constitution goes to the Law Minister (Dr. Ambedkar). He is a genius; he knows everything about all the laws and constitutions of the world; what he does not know is not worth knowing. He has worked very hard from the beginning to the end in spite of his indifferent health. Due to his ceaseless labour, this remarkable Constitution has been framed."

Dr. Rajendra Prasad: "Sitting in the Chair, and watching the proceedings from day to day, I have realised as nobody could have, with zeal and devotion the members of the Drafting Committee and specially its Chairman, Dr. Ambedkar, in spite of his indifferent health have worked (cheers). We would never make a decision which was or could be ever so right as when we put him on the Drafting Committee and made him its Chairman. He has not only justified his selection but has added lustre to the work which he has done."

Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru: "Dr. Ambedkar had played a most important part in the framing of India's Constitution. No one took greater trouble and care over Constitution making than Dr. Ambedkar."

As a befitting tribute to him, a life size statue of Babasahib Ambedkar has been installed in the compound of the Parliament House, New Delhi. Late Smt. Indira Gandhi, Late Shri Yashwant Rao Chavan, Late Karmaveer Dadasahib Gaikwad and Late Barrister B.D. Khobragade took a personal interest in this project to perpetuate his memory as 'Modern Manu'.

Hindu Code Bill

Beside drafting India's Constitution, Dr. Ambedkar had revised and submitted to the Constituent Assembly the Hindu Code Bill in October, 1948. As far back as 1941, the British Government of India had constituted a Committee under the Chairmanship of Sir B.N. Rao for the purpose of revising and codifying the Hindu Law.

The Bill was finally introduced in the Central Assembly in 1946. As the Minister of Law of the Government of independent India, Dr. Ambedkar took it upon himself the task of going critically through the Bill submitted to the Central Assembly by the Committee headed by Sir B.N. Rao in 1946. He made extensive modifications in the Bill. For the first time, the Bill as amended by Dr. Ambedkar, gave a Hindu woman the right to inherit property. This and several other changes introduced in the Bill by Dr. Ambedkar raised a storm of controversy all over the country. While some persons hailed the Bill as being truly revolutionary in nature and content, others vehemently condemned it as cutting at the very roots of Hindu religion and traditions. Although on the eve of the storm, Dr. Ambedkar, as usual, maintained his cool. He stated in his speech delivered at the Siddharth College, Bombay on January 11, 1950 that the Hindu Code Bill could not be described as revolutionary and went on to explain that the main purpose of the Bill was to codify as well as to modify certain areas of the Hindu Law which had remained nebulous or hazy so far, and to evolve a Civil Code for the Hindu society as a whole. He also pointed out that under the proposed Bill, a Hindu had been given the right to adopt any person belonging to the Hindu religion as well as empowered to make a will disinheriting his daughter(s) he so desired. In his speech, he copiously quoted from the Hindu *Shastras* and *Smritis* in support of his amendments. On the same evening, Dr. Ambedkar was presented

with a golden casket which had a copy of India's Constitution. In his speech, delivered at this function, Dr. Ambedkar stated with his characteristic humility that when he became a Member of the Constituent Assembly, he had no idea at all that he would be associated with the task of framing the constitution of independent India, much less being made the Chairman of the Drafting Committee. He once again exhorted the Scheduled Castes to think in terms of the welfare and the prosperity of India as a whole, since the country had now become independent and all the people inhabiting it should strive towards becoming a nation in spite of the religious, cultural and other diversities. The Maharashtrians of New Delhi also honoured Dr. Ambedkar at a function held on January 29, 1950. In his speech at this function held in New Delhi, he stated that Maharashtrians, as a whole, irrespective of caste and creed, were sincere and dutiful.

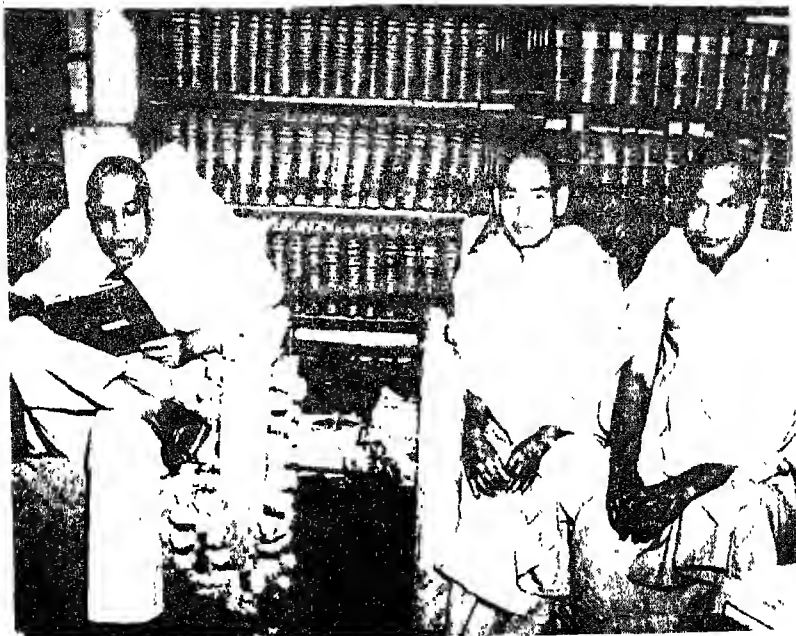
His 60th birthday, which fell on April 14, 1950 was celebrated throughout the country; at the function held at Bombay, Shri M.C. Chagla stated that every citizen of the country would remember Dr. Ambedkar's name not only for the work done by him for the upliftment of the downtrodden but also for the work done by him for the nation as a whole. At a function organised at New Delhi the late Shri Hanumanthayya, at that time an M.P., who later on held several important portfolios in the Union Cabinet, stated that Dr. Ambedkar would be hailed by the posterity as not only an authority on Constitutional Law but also as a saviour of the nation and expressed the fond hope that he would one day become the Prime Minister of the Indian Republic.

In the meantime, Dr. Ambedkar with his usual painstaking thoroughness re-drafted the Hindu Code Bill, taking into account the criticisms made both inside and outside Parliament. In November 1950, he circulated among the Members of Parliament a booklet stating the aims, nature and scope of the changes in the Hindu Code Bill, in the hope that the consideration of the Bill would be taken up soon during that session of Parliament itself. However, the Bill, for certain reasons, was not taken up for consideration. In December 1950, Dr. Ambedkar introduced in Parliament a Bill called the "Representation of the people (Number Two) Bill 1950" listing the qualifications and disqualifications for Membership of Parliament as well as State Legislatures and also outlining the manner in which free elections

should be conducted.

The Hindu Code Bill was finally introduced in Parliament on February 5, 1951, by Dr. Ambedkar. The Bill was debated for three days, during which several MPs strongly supported it while others equally strongly objected to it. Sardar Hukum Singh, who later on became Speaker of the Lok Sabha, denounced the Bill as an attempt on the part of the Hindus to draw within the fold of Hinduism, the Sikh community. Other Members argued that the Constituent Assembly, which had been renamed as Parliament, was an indirectly elected body and hence would not consider the Bill, on the grounds of constitutionality. Replying to all these arguments against the Bill, Dr. Ambedkar pointed out that this was the first attempt to apply *a common Personal law* to the Hindus all over the country. He also did not agree with the objection made by Sardar Hukum Singh and pointed out that the application of the Hindu Code to the Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains, has to be viewed in the historical perspective and it was rather late to raise any objections to it. He pointed out that though Lord Buddha and Lord Mahavira had started independent

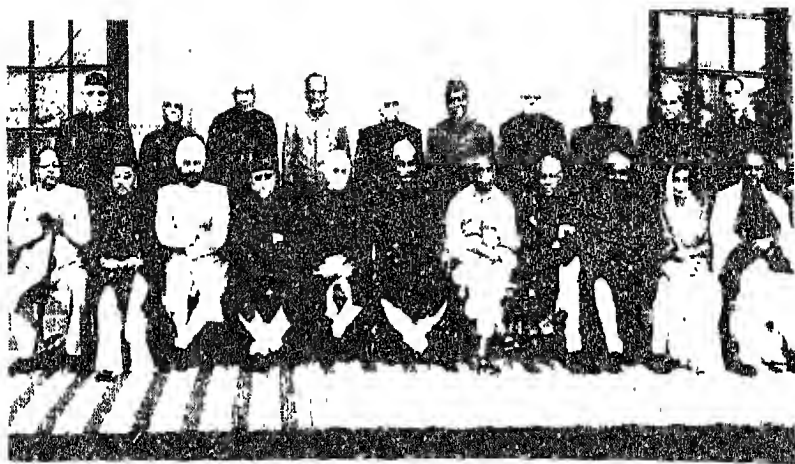
Dr. Ambedkar in his library at 1, Tilak Marg, New Delhi on April 14, 1950. Sitting with him are two Buddhist monks from Sri Lanka.



religions, viz. Buddhism and Jainism, because they disagreed with the Brahmins, they did not consider it either appropriate or necessary to propound any changes in the existing Hindu legal system. He went on to add that the same was the case with all the 10 Sikh Gurus. Answering those who had objected to the Bill as being against the concept of secularism, as contained in our Constitution, he stated that it did not imply that religion as such was ultimately to be done away with; and that it only meant that the Government would not, and could not force, any particular religion on the people of this country. He also did not agree that Parliament (i.e. the reconstituted Constituent Assembly) being indirectly elected was not competent to frame any laws for the country.

In May, 1951, the Representation of the People Bill was formally presented before the Parliament by Dr. Ambedkar. Delivering a speech which lasted one and a half hour, Dr. Ambedkar tried to dispel the doubts raised by various MPs. The debate had numerous breaks in which Dr. Ambedkar exchanged banter with some of the MPs. For example, when Dr. Parmar asked him if the political pensioners were debarred from becoming members of the House of Commons in England, Dr. Ambedkar's humorous retort was: "No, only Lords and Lunatics." On hearing this, the whole House went into peals of laughter.

Whatever spare time he had, Dr. Ambedkar spent it in promoting the interests of the People's Education Society, by opening several new institutions. His hectic life both in Parliament as well as outside again caused a deterioration in his health and finally he wrote to Pandit Nehru on August 10, 1951, informing him that his health was not too good and requesting him to give a higher priority to the Hindu Code Bill, on which he had worked very hard, so that the Bill might be taken up on August 16, 1951. In his reply Prime Minister Pandit Nehru advised Dr. Ambedkar, not to give this matter so much importance in the interest of his health, and added that because of the opposition both within and outside Parliament to the Hindu Code Bill, the Cabinet considered it advisable that it should be taken up in the beginning of September, 1951. Pandit Nehru kept his word and at the meeting of Congress Parliamentary Party held in the first week of September urged that the Hindu Code Bill may be quickly passed. It was the last session of Parliament before the election of 1952 were to be held. However, an overwhelming majority of the Congress MPs was



Dr. Ambedkar as a Member of the Nehru Cabinet

against this step and it was decided that on September 17, 1951, Parliament may take up only one Clause of the Hindu Code Bill viz. the Marriage and Divorce Clause and the other clauses pertaining to property may be taken up later subject to the availability of time. September 17, 1951, was again a memorable day in Dr. Ambedkar's life. The Bill was criticised by a person of the eminence of Dr. S.P. Mookerjee who stated that it would destroy the very foundations of the Hindu society and added that if the Bill was to be passed, this should be made applicable to the members of all religions. The Bill was opposed by Sardar B.S. Mann because, he like Sardar Hukum Singh, considered it to be a subtle means of pushing Sikhs into the Hindu fold. On the other hand, Shri N.V. Gadgil and Shri H.N. Kunzru supported the Bill. The debate was so intense that Panditji was forced to intervene and suggest that, as a measure of compromise, the Marriage and Divorce Part of the Bill may be treated as a separate Bill. Sensing the hostility to the Bill, Dr. Ambedkar himself announced on September 19, 1951 that this part may be treated as a self-contained Marriage and Divorce Bill, as the other parts of the Bill would not be taken up for discussion by the present Parliament due to want of time. Even this did not placate the MPs, and they continued to spend all available time in discussing this relatively non-controversial part of the Bill. Unfortunately, the Congress Parliamentary Party had not issued any 'Whip' asking its party MPs to vote in favour of the Bill and the discussion, therefore, went on and on. In his reply to the debate on September 20, 1951, Dr. Ambedkar stated that Dr. S.P. Mookerjee's

opposition to the Bill was not worth consideration, as Dr. Mookerjee had not opposed the Bill so long as he was in the Cabinet. He did so only after leaving the Cabinet. As for the opposition by the Sikh members, Dr. Ambedkar once again pointed out that the law of the land had always considered and treated Sikhs as Hindus in all legal matters. However, some of his rather strong or pungent remarks made the MPs even more determined in their opposition to the Bill and some of them did not spare even Panditji in their speeches, for his support to the Bill. It was, therefore, in a deep state of anguish and stress that Panditji requested Dr. Ambedkar to drop the Bill. He had done so without realising that it would be an affront to the dignity of Dr. Ambedkar. But he soon realised his mistake. Ultimately, on September 25, after several days debate only Clause 4 of the Hindu Code Bill was adopted by Parliament and even the entire Part 2 of the Bill pertaining the Marriage and Divorce, could not be accepted. Dr. Ambedkar was naturally deeply hurt at this episode and resigned from the Cabinet on September 27, 1951, when he sent his letter of resignation to Prime Minister. Pandit Nehru in his reply expressed admiration for the hard work done by him on this and also the other Bills presented by him in Parliament as the Minister for Law, and added that fate and the rules of procedure appear to be unfavourable to the passage of the Bill, in which he was himself deeply interested. Panditji reluctantly agreed to accept his resignation but from the last day of that session and requested Dr. Ambedkar to let him have a copy of the speech he intended to deliver on that occasion. In his reply dated October 4, 1951, Dr. Ambedkar informed Panditji that in case he found it possible to prepare a reply he would certainly give him a copy and added that he had already obtained the permission of the Deputy Speaker to make his statement on October 11, after the pending business in his name had been disposed of. However, on October 11, 1951, when he stood up to make a statement, he was told by the Deputy Speaker that he could not be allowed to speak since he had not submitted a copy of his statement to the Speaker. The Deputy Speaker further added that he should make his speech at 6.00 p.m. Shri H.N. Kunzru as well as Shri H.V. Kamath wanted to know from the Deputy Speaker whether this did not mean pre-censorship. Upon this, the Deputy Speaker said that he was doing it because he wanted to ensure that the statement to be made by Dr. Ambedkar did not contain anything "irrelevant or libellous." Dr. Ambedkar refused to obey such orders, collected his

papers and left Parliament in protest. Most of the Members were taken aback, but gave to existing former Law Minister loud applause. The next day Dr. Ambedkar sat on the Opposition Benches.

In his statement on the subject which he gave to the newspaper immediately after leaving the House, Dr. Ambedkar mentioned some major differences with the Prime Minister. The mood of bitterness in which he was at that time, Babasahib's reaction seemed to be too harsh to Pandit Nehru.

THE GREAT CONVERSION

Dr. Ambedkar had been since 1935 contemplating a change of religion for himself and his followers. However, he wanted to be careful in choosing the new religion. After a great deal of thought and reading books on different religions, Dr. Ambedkar finally decided that he would embrace Buddhism. On May 24, 1956 he announced in Bombay that he would get converted to Buddhism in October, 1956. In between he kept himself busy in writing the monumental book entitled "The Buddha and his Dhamma"

His health was once again causing anxiety to his family and followers. After consulting some of his friends, he announced that he would embrace Buddhism on October 14, 1956 at Nagpur, the well known city of Maharashtra which had once been a historical centre of Buddhism in the country. Bhikkhu Chandramani of Kushinara in the district of Gorakhpur (U.P) was invited by Dr. Ambedkar to initiate him into Buddhism.

October 14, also happened to be the day of *Dussehra* festival. Lakhs of men, women and children of the depressed classes kept coming to Nagpur from all over the country throughout the preceding week. The ceremony was held in an open ground at Shradhhanand Peth. In the press conference held by him on the eve of his conversion, Dr. Ambedkar told the news correspondents that he would strictly follow the original principles of Buddhism as laid down by Lord Buddha and not get involved in the different forms of Buddhism existing at present e.g. Hinayana and Mahayana. He explained that he had specifically chosen Buddhism for conversion because it was a religion born on the Indian soil and had become in course of time, an integral part of the Indian or a Bharatiya culture. He also expressed the fervent hope that in the next 10 or 15 years, India would become a Buddhist country. He

also announced his decision of starting a new political party viz., the Republican Party of India before the next elections and that the Party would be open to any Indian who believed in the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.

The morning of October 14, 1956 saw a huge crowd of men, women and children peacefully waiting for Dr. Ambedkar's arrival at the *Deeksha Bhoomi*. Dr. Ambedkar arrived there clad in a white silk *dhori* and a white coat. More than five lakh persons eagerly watched the initiation ceremony being performed by Bhikkhu Chandramani assisted by four other Bhikkhus. Dr. Ambedkar and his wife repeated the five vows administered to them by Bhikkhu Chandramani: abstinence from killing, stealing, telling lies, wrongful sex life and drinking. Finally, they bowed before the statue of Lord Buddha three times and placed petals of white lotuses at its feet. He then addressed the gathering and announced the 22 pledges, which he had himself formulated. While uttering the words "I renounce Hinduism", Dr. Ambedkar became highly emotional and his voice choked. It must have been a moment of great anguish for him to have been compelled to renounce the religion of his forefathers. He then asked those amongst the huge crowd who wanted to embrace Buddhism to stand up. The entire gathering rose in response and then he proceeded to administer to them the three refuges, the five precepts and the 22 pledges. Dr. N.B. Niyogi, ex-Chief Justice of the Nagpur High Court, also embraced Buddhism on this occasion.

Many leading newspapers like the *Indian Express*, Bombay and the *Hitavada*, Nagpur, praised Dr. Ambedkar for choosing a religion of Indian origin for conversion. Veer Savarkar considered that the conversion of Dr. Ambedkar to Buddhism was actually his reiteration of being a Hindu, since according to Veer Savarkar, Dr. Ambedkar had only got converted to a non-Vedic Indian religious system.

On October 16, 1956, Dr. Ambedkar was present at a similar mass conversion ceremony held at Chandrapur at the request of Barrister Rajabhai Khobragade and administered the pledges to a large number of men, women and children on that occasion. He then returned to New Delhi and on the repeated request of his friends and well-wishers agreed to attend the 4th Conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists to be held at Kathmandu, Nepal in November 1956. The Government of Nepal, which is the only Hindu State in the world, declared November 15, 1956 as a public holiday. The Conference was

inaugurated by King Mahendra of Nepal himself. In his speech delivered on this occasion, Dr. Ambedkar stated that he was not only of the view that Buddhism was the greatest among all religions but also considered that it was also a great social system. In another speech delivered on November 20, 1956 entitled "Buddha and Karl Marx" he stated that the goal of Buddha and that of Karl Marx was essentially the same, because both aimed at the removal of sorrow and exploitation from the face of the earth. However, he pointed out that Buddhism and Communism greatly differed in respect to the means of achieving this goal; while Communism was all out for the adoption of violent means, Buddhism laid emphasis on non-violence and morality. According to him, Buddhist religion was nothing if not moral. It was true that in Buddhism there was no God. But Buddhism had substituted morality for God.

On his way back from Kathmandu, while going to Sarnath Dr. Ambedkar delivered speeches at the Benaras Hindu University and Kashi Vidyapeeth in which he eloquently described the essence of Buddhism. This essence has been described by Dr. Ambedkar in detail in his posthumous book titled, "The Buddha and his Dhamma". According to him Buddhism directed man's search inwards to realise the potentiality hidden within himself. In the Vedas, we find prayer, praise and worship. In Buddhism for the first time we find training of the mind to make it act righteously. Mr. E.G. Taylor, in his 'Buddhism and Modern Thought' says "Man has been ruled by external authority long enough. If he is to be truly civilized, he must learn to be ruled by his own principles. Buddhism is the earliest ethical system where man is called upon to have himself governed by himself. Therefore, a progressive world needs Buddhism to teach it this supreme lesson."

On the eve of Great Conversion held on 15 October, 1956, Dr. Ambedkar spoke, thus: "The fundamental principle of Buddhism is equality. 'O' Bhikkus, you belong to different castes, and have come from various lands. Just as the great rivers when they have fallen into the great ocean lose their identity; just so, 'O' brethren do these four castes Kshatriyas, Brahmins, Vaishyas and Shudras when they begin to follow the doctrine and discipline as propounded by the Tathagatta (Lord Buddha), they renounce different names of castes and rank and become members of one and the same society. These are the words of Buddha."

CHAPTER XIII

THE END OF THE ROAD

After his visit to Nepal, Dr. Ambedkar's health began to deteriorate rapidly. He was eating very little and felt tired all the time.

However, neither he nor his wife who was herself a doctor, at all suspected that his life was going to end soon. They had made plans for leaving for Bombay by air on December 14, 1956. However, fate willed otherwise and Dr. Ambedkar passed away in sleep in the early morning of December, 6, 1956. His wife went to wake him up at about 7.00 a.m. that morning and found that he was no more. A large crowd assembled at 26, Alipur Road, Delhi where Dr. Ambedkar was staying. Pandit Nehru as well as Pandit Govind Vallabh Pant, Shri Jagjivan Ram and the Deputy Chairman of the Council of States came to pay their last homage. The funeral procession which started from 26, Alipur Road at 4.00 p.m. reached the Delhi airport at 9.00 p.m. All the streets on the way were lined with throngs of mourners. Pandit Nehru sent a wreath through a special messenger and several MPs and scholars were present at the airport. The plane which took off at 9.30 p.m. from Delhi touched down at Santa Cruz at 3.00 a.m. on December 7, 1956. The body was taken to *Rajagriha*, the residence built by Dr. Ambedkar. There was a spontaneous stoppage of work in all the factories, railway workshops, docks and textile mills in Bombay and also in other places like Nagpur and Sholapur. The mortal remains of Dr. Ambedkar were brought in a truck to the Dadar Hindu crematorium. Hundreds of policemen and several of the senior officers had to be posted there to keep the five lakh strong crowd in order. The funeral pyre was lit by Dr. Ambedkar's son Yashwant at 7.30 p.m. after the performance of the last rites by Buddhist priests. The policemen on the site sounded the "Last post", which was an honour given for the first time in Bombay to a non-official. Acharya P.K. Atre, the famous

Marathi playwright and film maker, delivered a moving speech on this occasion. Tributes were paid by the leaders of all the parties. Pandit Nehru said in Parliament that posterity would remember Dr. Ambedkar mainly as the symbol of revolt against the oppressive features of the Hindu society and conceded that although at times highly controversial, Dr. Ambedkar had played a very constructive and very important role in the activities of the Government of India. Panditji requested that Parliament may be adjourned for the day. The Government of Bombay State declared Dr. Ambedkar's birthday a public holiday and also handed over to the Buddhist Society 11 acres of the 14-acre piece of land at Nagpur where Dr. Ambedkar had embraced Buddhism. It also gave a small piece of land at the Dadar Hindu crematorium where his body was cremated. Thus came to an end a life full of struggles, sorrows, joys and, above all, exemplary devotion to duty. In the short span of 66 years, Dr. Ambedkar had packed much more vitality and done much greater deeds than what would be accomplished by some of his contemporaries who were fortunate enough to live a much longer life.



Postal stamp

Epilogue

Dr. Babasahib Ambedkar was truly a many-faceted personality. Besides being a highly disciplined person, mainly because of his



Statue of Dr. Ambedkar near Parliament House

upbringing, he was a man who was not daunted by the innumerable humiliations and insults to which he was subjected because of the accident of his birth as an untouchable. His indomitable spirit enabled him to acquire some of the highest academic degrees from illustrious centres of learning in England, the U.S.A. and Germany. Yet, in spite of having spent several years in the West, Dr. Ambedkar remained firmly anchored to his moorings as an Indian.

Dr. Babasahib Ambedkar's patriotism would always be beyond question. His speeches and writings were an ample proof of his love for his country. In fact, he prided himself for being a better nationalist than any other person of his generation.

Dr. Babasahib Ambedkar's range of scholarship and erudition was indeed stupendous. His writings and speeches covered such a diversity as the origin of castes in India, the division of country into linguistic States, the relationship of the Centre with the minorities, the relation of the British Indian Rupee to the British Pound, Small holdings in India, to the framing of the monumental Constitution of the Republic of India.

Endowed with independence of thought, every writing and speech of Dr. Ambedkar had a spark of originality in it. He was never willing to tow the wrong line, howsoever big the odds may be. He was painstakingly meticulous in marshalling facts and figures, for which he had a phenomenal memory.

Being essentially a rebel at heart and also by conviction, Dr. Ambedkar never minced his words either in his speeches or his writings. He was fully conscious of the attainments which he had acquired after so much sacrifice and this was, perhaps, the reason why he often appeared to be imperious and intolerant in his behaviour. He was meticulous both in thought and action, absolutely upright, and had an utter disdain for hypocrisy and sycophancy and never considered himself to be inferior to any other person. It were these traits of character, which often made him a controversial figure.

Dr. Babasahib Ambedkar was in fact a person born far ahead of his times. That was, perhaps, the reason why he was so often misunderstood by friends and foes alike. He was often impetuous and impatient, because he knew that the tasks before him and the country were indeed gigantic in proportions and needed to be tackled without dithering and delay. In this respect, as in several others, he strangely resembled Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru who was at times equally

impatient, imperious and in a hurry to build up his country into a strong, unified nation, despite its cultural, religious, lingual and ethnic diversities. Like Pandit Nehru, Dr. Babasahib Ambedkar was essentially a lonely man. And like him he did not have enough time to attend to his immediate family. Since both these great and noble sons of the country passed away from this world several years ago, it was mere speculation to envision the shape of things if circumstances had not forced them to part ways. In fact, each of them ploughed a lonely furrow.

As a Student

I am sure the younger generation, and the Indian society at large would draw immense inspiration from this biography. To begin with, we now know how he struggled during his school and college education in India and abroad to acquire the excellence in so many areas of knowledge. Recalling his experience as a student, Dr. Ambedkar once said "Owing to poverty, I used to attend school with nothing more than loin cloth on my body. I could not get water to drink in the school. When thirsty, I was not allowed to touch the tap myself. Untouchability was observed even in Elphinston College, Bombay." He could not offer Sanskrit because he was an untouchable. However, he became a great Sanskrit scholar because of his strong determination, hard work and industry. He often said that "given the opportunities we are inferior to none."

As a Social Reformer

Another aspect of his personality is his full commitment and devotion to remove the stigma of untouchability from the Indian society. He had himself experienced humiliation and insults all his life. That is why he rejected so many attractive offers and continued his struggle for winning human, social and political rights for the downtrodden people. Dr. Ambedkar had declared that the uplift of the untouchables was the uplift of the nation. The untouchables wanted the abolition of *Varnashrama*, and desired to lay down the principle that the rights, responsibilities and status should be determined not by the accident of birth but by merit alone. The untouchables aimed at a great social revolution as he had seen in them the dawn of a new civilisation.

As a Rationalist

His writings and speeches show that he was a rationalist to the core. Nothing would satisfy him if it did not appeal to logic and reason. He did not believe in false beliefs, superstitions, rituals or observances. By nature as well as by training, he hated to be vague and imprecise. That was why though many of us may wince at or feel hurt by some of his arguments or statements, we could reject them unless we deliberately chose to be blind to reason. The comments of 'The Times of India' dated 23 May, 1954 were very relevant in this respect. "Dr. Ambedkar's political life is the tragedy of a man who thinks that logic is applicable to politics. A thing, he affirms, is right because it is rational. Untouchability is wrong because it is irrational. Ambedkar being an essentially rational man, argues from premises to conclusions. But the vast herd of politicians is not rational. They argue backwards. They adjust their premises to support their conclusions."



The author addressing Babasahib Ambedkar Jayanti Celebrations in Delhi.

As a Nationalist

It is to be observed that in any act, social or political, he saw to it that he never acted against the interests of the nation. Nation's interest was always at his heart. He was patriotic to the core and wanted India to become a prosperous country. Dr. Ambedkar once said, "I profess implicit faith in articles of my creed. This country of ours is the true land of promise. This race of ours is the chosen race." He further said—Mr. Gandhi and Mr. Jinnah—I dislike them—I do not hate them—it is because I love India more. That is the true faith of a nationalist. I have hopes that my countrymen will some day learn that the country is greater than men." In his speech delivered in the Constituent Assembly of India on 25 November, 1949 he said; "In addition to our old enemies in the form of castes and creeds, we are going to have many political parties with diverse and opposing political creeds. Will Indians place the country above creed or will they place creed above country? I do not know. But this much is certain that if the parties place creed above country, our independence will be put in jeopardy a second time, and probably be lost for ever. This eventuality we must all resolutely guard against. We have to be determined to defend our independence with the last drop of our blood."

Against Caste System

In his book titled, "Annihilation of Castes" he says, "There is no doubt in my opinion, that unless you change your social order, you can achieve little by way of progress. You cannot mobilise the community either for defence or for offence. You cannot build anything on the foundation of caste. You cannot build up a nation, you cannot build up a morality. Anything that you will build on the foundations of caste will crack and will never be a whole." Therefore, according to him the society must be based on reason, and not a tradition of caste system. Thus with morality as the basis of all his actions, he did not become the slave of the circumstances and used every situation to gain supremacy rather than to bow to luck, destiny or fate.

Against Hero-worship

Dr. Ambedkar was not a hero-worshipper. He did not allow his followers to do it either, because he was very much conscious of the evils of hero-worship and the havoc it had caused in our country down

the centuries. The reason according to him was that "Over regard for leaders saps self-confidence of the masses; leaving them helpless when left leaderless in the hour of trial or when led by unscrupulous leaders."

"One great reason for the downfall of the Hindu society and the perpetuation of its degraded position is the injunction of '*Krishna*' that whenever in difficulties, the people should look out for his '*Avtar*' (incarnation) to redeem them from the slouch of despondency. That has made the Hindu community helpless in the face of calamity."

"I don't want you to follow such a ruinous teaching. I don't want you to be dependent on any single-personality for your salvation. Your salvation must lie in your own hands, through your own efforts."

A Great Man

In one of his speeches Dr. Ambedkar once said, "the great man must be motivated by the dynamics of social purpose, and must act as the scourge and the scavenger of society. These are the elements which distinguish an eminent individual as a great man and constitute his title-deeds to respect and reverence." Was Dr. Babasahib Ambedkar a great man? According to the tests and criteria laid down by himself, he was definitely so.

For those who are interested in knowing more about the life and work of Dr. Babasahib Ambedkar I would like to recommend in particular the books written by him as given in Appendix-I and reference books given in Appendix II.

As far as the present author is concerned, this is only a very novice-like attempt on his part to give a thumb-nail sketch of Babasahib's life, times, and his contributions to our ethos as a thinker, a champion of the down trodden, a visionary of the dimensions of a true statesman, and above all a scholar of deep erudition. This biography, therefore, proves the dictum that those who have initiative and drive and can work ceaselessly as missionaries, no matter to which caste, community or religion they belong to are able to move upward and make a mark. Babasahib was very fond of using the term '*Bharat*' for India and therefore, I conclude this humble tribute to his memory by saying "Jai Bharat, Jai Bheem"

APPENDIX I

BOOKS/PAPERS BY DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR

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8. Communal Deadlock and a Way to Solve it, F&O Printing (Delhi), 1945.
9. Pakistan or the Partition of India, Thacker (Bombay), 1946.
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12. Who were the Shudras? Thacker (Bombay) 1946.
13. States and Minorities, Thacker (Bombay) 1947.
14. The Untouchables, Amrit (New Delhi) 1948.
15. Maharashtra as a Linguistic State, Thacker (Bombay) 1948.
16. Thoughts on Linguistic States, Krishna Press (Bombay) 1955.
17. The Buddha and His Dhamma, Siddharth (Bombay) 1957.
18. Federation vs. Freedom, Bheem Patrika (Jullunder) 1970.
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5. Dongre M.K. Dr —Economic Thoughts of Dr B.R. Ambedkar, Ambedkar Samaj (Nagpur), 1974.
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